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BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2749.

PRISONERS AND CAPTIVES.

BY

HENRY SETON MERRIMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

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VOL. II.

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PRISONERS AND CAPTIVES

BY

HENRY SETON MERRIMAN,

AUTHOR OF "YOUNG MISTLEY," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1891.

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PRISONERS AND CAPTIVES.

CHAPTER I.

FOR THE LAST TIME.

It sometimes suggests itself that we shall in the hereafter be required to answer for words as well as deeds. The ordeal will be decidedly unpleasant for the majority of us, but we shall hardly be able to cavil at injustice, for it is only right that those who suggest evil deeds by evil words should be brought to task for the result.

In the majority of instances, however, our words are considerably superior to our deeds. We talk, in fact, much more prettily than we act; and still more do we suggest by words the beauty of action and the blessing of virtue in others. But there are words which go so far and achieve such distant results

that although the responsibility is unquestionably great it is hard to say whether evil or good predominate in the influence exercised. There are some lives which have been entirely influenced by a word or a few words strung jingling together. These words are sometimes spoken by father or mother, sometimes by some great man, some cultivated stringer together of alliterations, sometimes they are spoken from the pulpit. But the influence of a sermon frequently fades away and leaves the text behind it. The words, or sayings, or mottoes that have influenced human lives have usually been remarkable for terseness. The saying must be light, the sense of it must be clear and sharp, it must strike one in the face, and there must be biting claws to cling to the memory.

When our forefathers looked round for some striking design of bird or beast or fish, to work upon their silken pennant, and casually asked a learned monk for a few words in Latin or French to write beneath it, I wonder if they foresaw the responsibility they were assuming! I wonder if they dreamt that in years to come, when their bones were mouldering beneath the moss-grown stones of a little country churchyard (for, mark you! those fellows rarely died in cities)—I say, I wonder if the dream

ever came to them that the bearers of their name long after would look up to the motto upon the church wall and try to shape their lives according to it. Those words were a battle-cry then, and they are a battle-cry now. Our ancestors have much to do with our lives, much more than we think. A word or a name reaches into posterity. *"Noblesse oblige."*

And in our modern every-day whirl of existence a chance word let fall here and there may take root somewhere, may find a chink in some mind, and slip in there nestling and concealing itself, but making very sure of its stronghold.

Claud Tyars was not an impressionable man; indeed; he was a singularly hard one. His self-sufficiency was not of the bragging order, nor of the aggressive. His habit was to think things out carefully, and then to stick to his decision. Nothing now could turn him from his scheme of rounding Cape Chelyuskin and rescuing the Siberian prisoners to whom his word was pledged.

He knew himself to be a determined man. The throes of indecision were quite unknown to him. But a few words spoken by Miss Winter rather worried him as he turned away and went towards Helen Grace to procure himself a cup of coffee.

He wondered why she had told him so deliberately that Arctic matters were totally without interest to her, and why her eyes had informed him with obvious intention that his schemes and plans were a bore.

It happened that after all he was permitted to have a few minutes of Helen's undivided attention. Having been provided with tea or coffee, the old gentlemen had left her to seek the repose demanded by their aged limbs for purposes of digestion.

Tyars promptly appropriated the only vacant seat near at hand.

Since the conversation which he had had with Helen in this same room there was an indefinite difference in their relationship. It was not only that difference which comes with an increasing familiarity, although it savoured of a greater ease. Tyars, who was by no means a voluble man, felt that he had to some extent explained himself; that he had spoken a few at least of the difficult words which had tied his tongue. The mystery with which his movements had been surrounded was not of his own seeking, but the result only of necessity.

It thus came about that the two young people did not speak at once as partial strangers would have done, but sat in silence for some moments.

During this space she handed him a filled cup which he acknowledged with a little nod of the head, and the movement of his heavy moustache betokened the framing by concealed lips of a word which remained inaudible.

"I am afraid," he said at length, "that I am not popular this evening."

"Do you covet popularity?" she asked, brightly.

"Not in the least."

"And why do you fear that you are not popular to-night?"

"There are several old gentlemen dying to offer me advice, and I am not a sufficiently accomplished humbug to solicit it," he replied, with a little laugh, "and," he added, with sudden gravity, "Miss Winter has been snubbing me."

Helen looked at him seriously. His placid gray eyes met hers with a little smile full of unconscious purpose, the eyes of a man who goes ahead.

"Yes," he said, with a little nod, "I am beginning to find that the North Pole is further off than I thought it was."

He had got so accustomed to consider his first expedition as a mere preliminary to a second having for its aim the North Pole, that his conscience passed over many little deceptions now without a pause.

Helen seemed to attach some importance to Miss Winter's caprice.

"What did she say?" was her next inquiry.

"She went out of her way to inform me that she considered me a bore with my Arctic expeditions."

Helen looked puzzled, and gathered no hope of elucidation from the grave face before her. He did not seem to dream of offering any solution; indeed the position he occupied was more that of an inquirer.

"Did Agnes," she asked, at length, "say anything about Oswin?"

"No! Did you expect that she would?"

"Scarcely," she replied; "but . . . but I should have preferred her to do so."

He played meditatively with the small silver spoon lying in his saucer, and said nothing, leaving her in ignorance as to whether he detected a subtle meaning in her remark or not.

At this moment they were interrupted by a garrulous old gentleman who had been sent by his wife to procure her a second cup of coffee as quietly and unobtrusively as possible. Tyars continued to amuse himself with the spoon until this docile husband had gone off jubilantly, then he looked up and

spoke in an abrupt way which was habitual with him. He seemed almost to expect other people to follow out the same sequence of thought as himself.

"There is one rule, you know," he said, "to which I adhere without exception. I take no man who has ties at home, no man who is married or engaged, no man upon whose labours any one is wholly or partially dependent."

By way of reply Helen looked across the room towards her brother, and Tyars followed the direction of her glance. Oswin was talking interestedly enough with the plain daughter of an ugly admiral. Miss Winter was still engaged in lively converse with Matthew Mark Easton. The two seemed quite content. Each ignored the presence of the other, completely and unaffectedly.

Now this pastime of watching from afar is full of teaching, for we usually learn from the result that we knew, after all, remarkably little of the proceedings. We are warned against false prophets, but most of us could fill a fair-sized volume with false prophecies about our neighbours.

It would seem that Claud Tyars was not disposed to waste much time in speculation. Perhaps he deemed that Miss Winter and Oswin Grace were quite capable of taking care of themselves—a really

serviceable plan of action which I would recommend to old and young for practical every-day application. He ceased studying these persons from afar, and turned his attention to a more pleasing object which had the obvious advantage of proximity.

There are some people who need not seek among colours for a shade to suit them, for black does them greatest service. Very white arms and a graceful, rounded neck need never fear black, and girls possessing the slim strength of carriage which was so noticeable in Helen Grace cannot do better than cultivate sombreness of garb. Alas! most of them have, however, opportunity enough of finding this out for themselves.

Tyars' gaze, slow and thoughtful—the gaze that stores up food for the memory—continued to rest upon the girl until she became conscious of it.

"Oswin," he then said, practically, "knows this. I made the rule in consultation with him. It is a desperately matter-of-fact and practical rule. No sentiment—it is not in our line."

She laughed, unconcernedly enough.

"No. I have never known Oswin descend so low as that."

It seems rather hard to realize that Claud Tyars had never known a girl so intimately as he now

knew Helen Grace. He was sisterless, and his closest friend, Matthew Mark Easton, was no more fortunate. He had at one time "moved in society," as the story-books have it, but we all know what that means—we all know that a girl puts on her evening dress and her evening manner at the same time. Men change with a change of clothes, but women are subject to a still greater alteration. The man who falls in love and does all his wooing in the ball-room, is to be pitied. He sees a girl at her best for the moment, and at her worst for a life-time. Claud Tyars had made many ball-room acquaintances, and some had been continued in daylight, but he had never hitherto been allowed an insight into the home life of an English girl. He had never up to now shared aught else than pleasure with one, and it is not in the participation of pleasure that we learn to know women best, and at their best.

The most fortunate possessors of sisters can hardly comprehend the position of a man like Claud Tyars, for a sister leads us to catch glimpses of human life from the feminine point of view; and above all she has her friends. Look around you, and you will find that those men who were brought up with sister or sisters have made the best choice in wives. No man is any the worse for beginning

life with the friendship of a woman. Some of our own friends, we must admit, have gone to the bad, and of course we utterly disclaim them now, the recollection of our former familiarity has quite vanished. We remember now that we were never intimate with them, our eyesight is often defective when we meet in the street, and we are given to great pre-occupation when they stare deprecatingly. We give thanks inwardly that we are not as these publicans, and think comfortably of the tithes that we give, because we cannot help giving. You see therefore that we are exceedingly worthy beings, and consequently quite beyond reflection. We merely mention that some persons with whom in our callow youth we were slightly acquainted, have not realized their mothers' hopes, because we wish to seek out several peculiarities which may have influenced their downward career. These men, then, were not members of a mixed family. They had not played in a nursery with little girls, later on they had never been boy lovers to some long-haired fairy. They had not even been dancing men. Few dancing men go to the bad. They may be muffs, fops, dandies, snobs; but let us be just to them nevertheless.

Although Claud Tyars had been a social success —although he had been a renowned dancer, and

never the victim of those little ball-room subterfuges which sting manly vanity very deeply, he had never been a ladies' man. He was actually in the habit, if you please, of treating ladies as if they thought earnest thoughts, as if they possessed reasoning powers, only differing from those of noble man so much as different environments rendered imperative. He had followed out this treatment so thoroughly that he had up to this time found but few members of the fairer sex in whom he could take the slightest interest. It was perhaps hardly a satisfactory view to hold, because there are not very many women who can bear successfully the treatment mentioned. Claud Tyars had however encountered exceptions, and the most noticeable of them was undoubtedly the girl whom he had met by the merest accident at the Brasenose ball some years before. A girl who, in spite of being the best dancer in the room, was not as light in head as in foot; who was thoughtful as well as beautiful, independent without superiority, and perhaps just a little disdainful without being aware of it. He had not forgotten the peculiar sweeping line of delicate nose, and lips, and chin, which in some way suggested an old portrait. There was something Stuart-like in that face, with its softer lines in the girl, and the harder for the

brother; something that recalled the days when men were content to die for a face, and loved to fight for no other reward than a smile from eyes that were fascinatingly sad.

This same face was before him now, and it almost seemed as if he had looked on it every day since his Cambridge years. I wonder what it is, that strange sense of familiarity with certain faces and certain things which comes to us at times, and then fades away again without explanation.

Although at times Claud Tyars could be lively enough, his presence was calculated rather to lend thoughtfulness than hilarity to an assembly. The Creator has endued all large things with a solemnity which nothing that is small can ape. If the young hostess had reckoned upon Tyars as a guest likely to tell amusing anecdotes to select groups of old ladies, or even to keep one young lady in a constant ripple of laughter, she must have been disappointed. He was distinctly dull, overshadowed by a great preoccupation, or labouring under some discomforting thought.

He thanked her for the coffee in a grave way, refused a second cup, and then sat replying in monosyllables to all her sparkling sallies. Occasionally he joined, ignorantly with a smile, in the laughter

that reached them from the corner of the room where several guests had congregated around Miss Winter and Matthew Mark Easton; but it was quite plain that he had no idea of the joke, and was merely echoing.

At last there was a move on the part of the largest lady present to depart, and Claud Tyars rose promptly.

A general exodus followed, and Easton refused gaily for himself and Tyars, Oswin's invitation to stay and have a cigar. This delayed them a few moments, and they were thus the last to say good-bye.

While Easton was making a somewhat prolonged transatlantic speech to the admiral respecting his fine hospitality, Tyars found himself standing beside Helen alone in the drawing-room, for Oswin had gone to seek cigars.

"I am afraid," said Tyars, "that I have been a trifle duller than usual this evening. I am sorry."

She laughed, and for a moment did not know what to say. She flushed slightly, and in the glowing light looked very lovely, as she said—

"I hope that does not mean that you have been bored." There was no hint of coquetry in her question, and he answered it gravely enough.

"I do not know what it is to be bored."

When the front door had been closed behind them, Tyars said to his companion, Matthew Mark Easton, without removing the cigar from his teeth—

"That door has closed behind me for the last time."

"Why?" inquired the American.

"Because," was the cool reply, "I prefer keeping out of number one hundred and five Brook Street."

CHAPTER II.

MISS WINTER MOVES.

On the evening of the Admirals' Club dinner, early in December, Helen had been in the habit of dining at the Winters'. Although Agnes Winter was now alone, she seemed singularly anxious to keep up this custom, and Helen acceded to her proposal readily enough. Oswin was easily disposed of. A sailor returning to London, after an absence of some years, can usually employ his evenings satisfactorily.

It happened that Miss Winter was absent from town during the three days preceding the anniversary, and Helen was therefore left in ignorance as to the nature of the entertainment to which she was invited. It seemed probable that there should be other guests, and she provided for this contingency in the selection of her dress.

As she drove through the fog and gloom of December streets, the thought came to her, however, that had there been other guests her brother Oswin would, in the ordinary course of events, have been

invited. This thought generated others; and before the little brougham drew up smoothly, the young girl was verging upon a conviction that the course of events had diverged already from the commonplace. She was not, therefore, surprised to see Miss Winter standing at the head of the brightly-lighted, softly-carpeted stairs to greet her. Before she spoke Helen had guessed that they were to pass the evening alone together, and as she mounted the stairs she did her best to quell an indefinite feeling of discomfort. Now, when one looks forward with a feeling of discomfort to the prospect of passing an evening in the undisturbed society of one's dearest friend, it is more than probable that there is what is vaguely called something wrong. Two very commonplace, much-used, every-day words. Something—and— wrong. Yet place them together, and you will find the text of many a human life. You will find the preface to most human sorrows.

"Anything wrong, old fellow?"

"Yes; something wrong."

What a ludicrously taciturn nation we are, after all! How many times have most of us heard the above words? How many times have we asked the question, or answered it? And how many times has the answer made its mark upon a whole life?

Miss Winter, however, was smiling and cheery.

"How are you, dear?" she said, fingering deftly her friend's wraps. "So glad you have come! I was almost afraid the fog would stop you. I have only been home half an hour; just time to change my dress! Oh! you have got on your black tulle. I am so sorry I forgot to tell you that we should be quite alone. It is too cold to get up dinner-parties. We will have a cosy evening. Ann," she added, to the staid and elderly maid, "let us have dinner at once."

During the *tête-à-tête* meal Miss Winter entertained her friend with a lively description of the visit to a country house which had just terminated. The usual sort of thing—a dance, some private theatricals, and the bewildering society of one young man who had written a book, and of another who was going to write one some day. She was not really cynical, this little lady. She could afford to lay aside that arm, which is at its best but a temporary weapon, soon losing its edge; but this evening she was inclined to be a trifle severe. She seemed to be labouring under a necessity of talking and laughing at any price.

The literary lions were fleeced mercilessly, the amateur actors were criticized as if they had been attempting to make money by their performance, and

the dancing of the local swains was held up to scathing ridicule.

"You can imagine how hard I was pressed, my dear," she said, as they went up-stairs together after dinner, "when I tell you that I was forced to tear my shoe—a thing I have only done once before, at Woolwich Academy, in the heyday of my early youth."

Helen laughed, where laughter seemed appropriate, and commiserated freely.

The drawing-room looked intensely cosy. Miss Winter had been an early upholder of lamps, when gas first began to go out of favour in London drawing-rooms. One huge lamp—a soft yellow circle of light, supported by a long ornamented silver pillar with Corinthian flutings, the whole no thicker than a walking-stick, stood upon the table in the centre of the room. Two arm-chairs, and two only, small and low, were drawn forward to the fire, and between them a small table, promising coffee.

In response to a little gesture of the hand Helen took possession of one of the chairs. Miss Winter took up an evening newspaper, of which the careful cutting betrayed no tampering on the part of a literary cook, and slowly unfolded it.

"I want," she said, "to see who is acting in that

new piece at the Epic. I had a note from Oswin to-day, proposing to make up a party for next Wednesday."

"Yes; he spoke to me about it. I should like to go."

Miss Winter continued to unfold the paper with a considerable bustle. She was not looking at it but at Helen, who seemed interested in the texture of an absurd little lace handkerchief.

"Who—is going?"

The girl raised her head and frowned slightly, as if making a mental effort.

"Let me see—papa, Oswin, you, myself, and—and—oh yes! Mr. Tyars."

Miss Winter had succeeded at last in finding the theatrical column, and studied the closely-printed lines for some time attentively. There was a little clock upon the mantel-piece, which presently gathered itself together with an officious whirr, and struck nine. It seemed desirous of drawing attention to its own industry, for it ticked more loudly and aggressively after the effort.

Helen sat looking at it as if wondering that it should dare to break the somewhat heavy silence. She had her back turned towards the lamp, but the fire had fallen together a few minutes before, and

there was a single bright flame leaping and falling spasmodically. This lighted up her face, and betrayed the presence of a drawn, anxious look in her eyes. She made a little shrinking movement with her shoulders, and glanced furtively back towards her companion. Miss Winter had dropped the newspaper on the floor. She had approached, and was standing close beside the girl.

"Helen—!"

It was almost a gasp. The girl seemed to make an effort, but she succeeded in smiling.

"Yes—dear."

Miss Winter was not an impulsive woman. There was a graceful finish and sense of leisure about her movements, but before Helen could move, her friend was kneeling on the white fur hearthrug drawing her towards her, forcing her to face the light.

"Helen! let me see your face!"

It was almost a command, and the girl obeyed, slowly turning. Her eyes were dull, as if with physical agony.

Miss Winter relinquished the warm soft fingers. She half turned, and sat with her hands clasped in her lap, gazing into the fire.

"When—" she asked, "when was it? Long ago at Oxford, or only just lately?"

"I suppose," Helen answered, quietly, "that it was long ago at Oxford; but—but I think I did not know it."

This daughter of a sailor race was not given to tears, but now her lashes were glistening softly. It is not the bitterest tear that falls.

"My poor, poor Helen!" murmured Miss Winter, stroking her friend's hand gently.

Helen replied by a sickening little laugh.

"It is a little awkward, is it not?" she said.

A wince of pain passed across the elder woman's face.

"And he—" she asked, at length, "Claud Tyars —he has said nothing?"

"Of course not."

Miss Winter's eyes fell on the newspaper lying open at her feet. Mechanically she read the heading of a long article on the "New Arctic Expedition." Her heart sank within her.

"But, Helen," she whispered, "do you think he—"

"Hush, dear," interrupted the girl. "Don't ask me that."

Then there followed a long silence, while these two gracious women sat hand in hand. We know, we who have passed through the mill, that sorrow is

not the exclusive inheritance of the poor. Sorrow is a little thing. It is intangible—it is a shadow. And it creeps through fine-wrought key-holes, up soft-carpeted stairs, through silken curtains. It nestles upon the finest, whitest pillows. It sits with diamonds upon the fairest breasts.

In this warmly-curtained room where every chair, every curtain, every minutest ornament was an expression of taste and comfort, where two fair women sat clad in silk and fine linen, sorrow hovered in the air. For are we not told that it is our inheritance? And there is nothing so sure as heredity. I know a woman whose father died mad. She wriggles and twists beneath the ban of heredity. She tries to persuade herself that she is not her father's daughter, she even laughs at her own fears. She accounts glibly for her own mental sensations, she welcomes with thirsty heart all instances where the curse of the father has not been visited upon the children. But does she think that she will escape? Most assuredly not! And from a disinterested point of view it seems probable that she is right. Whatever she may have lived in the way of a life, her death will be that of her father's daughter.

That is but one instance. She is an exceptional and an unfortunate heiress. But if there is one

thing certain on earth, it is that we all have an inheritance. We cannot wriggle out of it, we cannot twist it aside. We read of sorrow—we hear that our grandmothers and grandfathers dabbled in it, and the fact lends to them a pleasantly romantic interest. But do we realize that as surely as they dabbled shall we dabble? Or we may wade knee-deep in it. We may sink and be overwhelmed. We are like soldiers going out to battle. Private Smith may fall—a bullet may find its billet in the brain of Major Jones! But Private I—Major Me—no, the idea is too absurd! To lapse once more into egotism. We are told that a friend has been killed by the fall of a heavy block from aloft. "Poor fellow," we think, "but what a fool not to get out of the way!" Now we should have got out of the way! *Voilà!* Are we not like that?

Miss Winter was the first to speak. This had not taken her by surprise, but our mind very often takes a little time to digest a fact in which there was no surprise. Of course she had known before, but there was a difference now. It had not been a misfortune before—and now it was simply the greatest misfortune that could have come. For she knew Claud Tyars now, and she knew that such a man was far beyond her influence—that he would

go on this expedition if he tore his own heart in two in so doing. She attributed this to his nature. It was merely the indulgence of a passion, the satisfaction of a singular sense of resolution and grim determination. She was, of course, ignorant of the other motive, of the real object of Tyars' expedition. That was cleared up afterwards—years afterwards when it was too late to make any difference. Mark this last-named detail—it is characteristic of most earthly elucidations.

"And you want to go on Wednesday?" inquired Miss Winter, with a dawning wonder in her tone.

"Yes; I want to go—very much, Agnes."

There was a spell of silence, after which Miss Winter spoke as much to herself as to her companion.

"I cannot understand that," she said; "I should have thought that you would have preferred not going."

"So should I," replied the girl, in a voice which crisped her listener's face with pain, "of any one else. But when—it is oneself—one thinks quite differently—I find."

Again she finished her sentence with a nauseating little laugh, so utterly miserable was it.

There are some sorrows which are sorrows at once. They spring into existence in all their crude development, and there is no possibility of mistaking them. Others develop slowly—it is uncertain whether they will turn out to be sorrows or not, although as things go the chances are by no means even. And somehow these two women seemed to take it for granted that this love which had forced its way into Helen's heart was a thing of tears.

"Is it not much better," urged Miss Winter, practically, "to avoid seeing him?"

Helen shrugged her shoulders before replying.

"Why? What is the good of it? It is not as if there were any chance of my—I mean—Agnes —you know that it will never be any different with me."

"Still," said the woman of the world, "I should avoid him. Do not ask him to the house."

"You need not fear that. He will never come to Brook Street again."

Miss Winter looked sharply round.

"How do you know that?" she asked.

"I could see it. He made it obvious enough when he said good-bye to papa and to me—the other night."

"Then, Helen," said the elder woman with con-

viction, "he did it on purpose, and if he did it on purpose . . ." She stopped, arrested by a glance from the girl's soft, thoughtful eyes.

"It is either a misfortune or a crime," she added, sadly.

"It is a misfortune."

Miss Winter was not, however, the sort of woman to admit that.

"No," she said; "I do not see why."

The girl turned on her sharply.

"How can it be anything else?" in a hard, heart-broken voice.

"It might be," persisted Agnes Winter; "it would be with any man but Claud Tyars, with any girl but you! As it is . . ."

"As it is," echoed Helen, taking advantage of a pause, "he will go, and if he comes back he will go again until—until he does not come back. And I—I suppose I shall muddle on with Clothing Clubs and Girls' Friendly Societies, and the Church Extension. I shall wear unbecoming bonnets and thick boots; shall brush my hair back very tight, and polish my face with soap. I shall develop into an intensely energetic and talkative middle-aged female, whose existence or non-existence is a matter of perfect indifference to all the world excepting a few other

energetic and talkative middle-aged females. Ha! ha! No, Agnes, dear; don't look so solemn. It is all right. I shan't take to unbecoming good works. It will all come right in the end. These things always do—at least we say they do, which comes to the same thing. It does not make any difference, so the brightest side must be kept turned towards the outside world. I wish you would give me some tea. It has been standing under that elegant cosy ever since we came up. I wonder why no one has invented a cosy yet which is anything but absolutely hideous."

Miss Winter rose from her humble position on the hearthrug. She was still lithe and supple, this daughter of the great city, despite the gracious roundness of her form. She obeyed Helen's request, pouring out the tea in thoughtful silence; but she failed to smile at her friend's gaiety. Gaiety, you see, is not always a thing to smile at. Laughter is not always a sign of joy.

She was thinking deeply. This lady had upon most things very decided opinions. She was, as already stated, somewhat in the habit of treating individual men as representatives of a type, and in the same spirit she met the difficulties of life. She maintained that there was in most circumstances a wrong thing

to do and a right. Moreover, she invariably made it her aim to set about, practically and methodically, finding the right.

"Helen," she said, "will you tell me one thing?"

The girl moved uneasily, keeping her eyes averted.

"I think not," she answered; "you can ask it, but I do not think that I will answer."

"Long ago," murmured the low voice of the elder woman, "long ago at Oxford did you think—Helen, forgive my asking — did you think that he loved you?"

There was a long silence, broken only by the officious little clock upon the mantel-piece and the heated creak of the glowing cinders. Then at last the answer came.

"No—no, certainly not. But he was different from the others—quite different. It seems ridiculous, but at the time I thought that it was because he was a Cambridge man."

"Then if you had not met again this would not have happened?"

"No," answered Helen, gravely; "it would not. I wonder why Oswin should have saved *him,* of all men, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Now I must go, Agnes. It is ten o'clock."

CHAPTER III.

A SERMON.

On this same day Oswin Grace dined with Claud Tyars at his club. It was in this manner that he disposed of his unoccupied evening.

During the actual meal, served in a tall, hushed, and rather lonesome room, by a portentous gentleman in red plush breeches and pink stockings, there was not much opportunity for private conversation. A few friends of Tyars came at intervals and stopped to exchange some words before sitting down at their own particular table. There was about all these gentlemen a similar peculiarity, namely, a certain burliness of chest and flatness of back. They had one and all been boating men in their time. They did not boast of many honours, nor possessed many degrees among them, but most of them had been in the "Boat" in their time, and some of them were "strokes" as well as Claud Tyars.

After dinner the two men lounged up the broad staircase to the smoking-room. There were two vast

chairs near a secondary little fireplace at the far end of the room, and to these Tyars led the way.

There is nothing like a cigar, coupled with a club chair, to conduce to pleasant meditation. Oswin was inclined to be merry, but Tyars made no attempt to conceal his pre-occupation. He had naturally much to think of, and it had as yet not been noticed among his colleagues how strictly he kept matters in his own hands. About the ship and her crew, her outfit and her capabilities, he consulted his subordinate freely enough, but as Easton had once remarked, the executive was wholly in his own hands. He saw personally to every detail, made all purchases, gave all orders; and everything was done in a matter-of-fact and business-like manner which showed great powers of organization.

Although the two men were by now quite familiar friends, there were certain phases in Claud Tyars' character which were as unintelligible to Oswin Grace as they had been months before on board the *Martial*. The young lieutenant still confessed freely that Claud Tyars was a "rum fellow." One generally finds a statement of this description tantamount to an admission of inferiority. It is just possible that Tyars had chosen this young sailor to aid him in his tremendous enterprise on account of that same

inferiority. Men who are born to command and love commanding are usually found in association with such as are obviously inferior to them. In some cases the selection is instinctive, in others it is deliberate; but Claud Tyars had unconsciously set his choice upon this man, knowing him to be a good sailor, a bold navigator, and an able officer. The choice had been made very quickly, with that strange haste which almost amounts to impetuosity, and which usually characterizes the action of prominent and successful men. Tyars was not conscious of his own strength, and did not therefore choose Oswin Grace because he was of weak will and easily led.

The elder man was the first to break the silence. He removed the cigar from his lips and watched the fire burn while he spoke.

"You have not," he said, interrogatively, "got leave from the Admiralty yet?"

"Not yet," was the answer returned confidently. Grace evidently anticipated no difficulty.

"Then don't do it."

The little square-shouldered man sat up, but Tyars bore with perfect equanimity the glance of a remarkably direct pair of eyes.

"What the devil do you mean, Tyars?"

"Don't you think that you had better stick to brass-buttons and slave-catching?"

For once there was a lack of conviction in his voice.

"No, I don't!" replied the other, with plenty of conviction. He was leaning back again in the deep chair; but his bronzed face wore a singular gray colour, while his gaze never swerved from his companion's features.

"What is it?" he continued in a quieter voice; "my seamanship?"

"No," replied Tyars, "that is a matter of history. It was your seamanship that brought the *Martial* home. Every one recognizes that."

"Then," said Grace, illogically, "let me go as A. B."

Tyars laughed.

"I do not think," he said, "that you ought to go at all. You must feel it yourself, and now is the time to draw back—before it is too late."

"My dear man—I don't feel it, and I don't want to draw back."

Grace was smiling now. Things were not so serious as they had at first appeared. He was still waiting for Tyars' reason. He knew that his whilom chief was not the man to change his mind without

strong motives, and already he pictured himself relegated to a lower position on board the Arctic vessel.

"Why," he asked, "do you want to get rid of me?"

"I don't want to get rid of you. There is no man afloat whom I would put in your place. But I must be consistent. I have refused many good men for the same reason. You have too many—home ties."

Grace found time to relight his cigar, and the match illuminated rather a flushed face.

"What do you mean?" he asked at length, in a voice rendered unconscious with only partial success.

It was an awkward question, for Tyars had been assured by this man's sister that there existed a distinct understanding between him and Miss Winter.

He was not an adept at prevarication.

"You see," he said, awkwardly, "I am quite alone in the world. I have no one to sit at home and worry over my absence or my silence. I should like all the fellows who go with me to be in the same circumstances."

A somewhat prolonged silence followed—the stately silence of a club-room, with padded doors and double windows. The two men smoked medi-

tatively. I wonder how many lives have been made or marred over a cigar!

"I suppose," said Grace at length, "that Helen has been getting at you."

Tyars was to some extent prepared for this, but he moved rather uneasily in his luxurious chair.

"No," he answered, "you know your sister better than to think that. She is not that sort of woman."

Oswin Grace smiled. He was rather proud of his sister. She was, he opined, the sort of sister for a sailor to have. Not a fretting, high-strung girl, but cool and self-contained and strong—a fair sweet sample of that most enduring of womankind, an English lady. Tyars' words conveyed a compliment, manly and terse, such as a gentleman may permit himself to imply in the presence of a brother.

"Then," he said, cheerfully, "if Helen does not mind it is no one else's affair."

"How do you know," asked Tyars, "that she does not mind?"

"You have just said so."

"Never."

"Then what did you say, or mean to say?"

"I meant," replied the elder man, "that I never

asked her whether she would mind or not, and therefore do not know."

"You merely told her that I was going."

Tyars nodded his head, and smoked with some enthusiasm.

"And—?"

"And she did not say in what way it would affect her; only suppose we are away two years—suppose we don't come back at all. Your father is an old man—she will be alone in the world."

Oswin Grace stroked his neatly-cropped beard thoughtfully.

"Helen," he said at length, "will marry."

Like most big men Tyars possessed the faculty of sitting very still. During the silence that followed this remark, he might have been hewn of solid stone, so motionless was he as to limbs, features, and even nerves. At length he moistened his lips and turned his slow gaze to meet that of his companion, who was sitting forward in his chair awaiting the effect of this argument. There was a waiter arranging the newspapers on a table near at hand, and before replying Tyars ordered coffee.

"Yes," he said, "that is probable, and she always has her friend—Miss Winter."

Oswin Grace relapsed suddenly into the chair.

"Yes," he said, "she will always have Agnes Winter, and if she married, her friendship would be only the more useful."

That settled it. Claud Tyars gave a little sigh of relief, and helped himself to coffee.

"Shall I," he said, "put sugar in yours?"

"Yes, please."

"Two lumps?"

"Two small ones," replied Grace.

They discussed this question just as gravely as the other.

Then, when the waiter had withdrawn, Tyars returned to the orginal subject of the conversation.

"Of course," he said, "if you feel quite free from the slightest moral obligation, I have nothing more to say."

"Thank you," replied Oswin Grace, with relieved cheeriness; "that is exactly how I feel. But, old fellow, I wish you would give me notice when you feel a fit like that coming on. It gave me a beastly fright. Quite a turn, as my washerwoman said, when she saw my shirt-cuff covered with red paint."

There was evidently not the slightest afterthought. Oswin was genuinely enthusiastic, and showed it—showed it, in fact, much more than did Claud Tyars, who was essentially a son of this nineteenth century,

where enthusiasm is hardly known. Enthusiasm about evil things is not desirable, but it would at least show sincerity. We cannot even go to the dogs with enthusiasm nowadays. Tyars may have been honest enough in his intention to give his subordinate a chance of withdrawing, but it is probable that he never recognized the possibility of such an action on the part of Oswin Grace. A man capable of doing so was certainly not the person to select for the work that lay before them.

They now lapsed into mere technicalities, which will not bear setting down here. There are some people who disapprove of Arctic expeditions, but there are also persons who withhold their approval of mountaineering and of football. If this volume fall into the hands of any such, I bow most meekly. Heavens forbid that they should be persuaded to do any of these things! To play football, for instance, on my side; to climb a snow-slope in front of me; to have anything whatever to do with the navigation of an Arctic vessel with myself on board—Heavens forbid that I should uphold in wordy contest the taking of a part in any of these ventures! But it may be pointed out that those who do so know what they are about. The risks and the chances are infinitely better known to them than they are to

literary folk and mere newspaper pesterers. If, knowing the risk so well, certain persons choose to run it —*mon Dieu!* whose business is it?

These young men are not held up as heroes because they were pleased to risk the only life they possessed (or were likely to possess) on a hair-brained scheme for relieving the misery of the most pitiable body of people on the face of the earth. It is not for us to say whether they did right or wrong.

Of course their design was a deliberate breach of the law; but it was the law of another country, and we all know that the laws of a foreign country are a mere joke; a series of quips and cranks compiled for the amusement of travellers, and in no way binding upon Englishmen. This, at all events, appears to be the view generally taken by our countrymen abroad.

There is, however, a higher law than that of nations—the Law of Humanity. We Britons at one time set an example in the application of this law, but we have now other things to attend to. The whole world indeed must have its hands full, or else its vastest nation would never be allowed to cast an indelible stain upon this century and generation. We get up subscriptions and we write huge letters to the newspapers about atrocities, Bulgarian, Cretan, and

other. Well-intentioned men dispute continuously and fruitlessly as to whether certain objects seen on the banks of a certain river were the remnants of a haystack or the remains of a crucified man.

Atrocities seek you? They are not far. There is a very comfortable train from Charing Cross at eleven o'clock in the morning which will land you at the railway-station at St. Petersburg in about fifty hours. For sixty kopecks you can drive in a really luxurious droscky straight down the Newski Prospect and past the Admiralty. There from the English quay you can look on one of the great atrocities of the day, namely, the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. That same evening at half-past eight you can take a train on to Moscow, and after a short drive over cobble-stones now instead of wood, as in the Prospect, you can look on atrocity number two—the House of Preliminary Detention. And these are but introductions to the great atrocity of Siberia.

Even in bygone days, before the ages were illumined, political prisoners were treated with some sort of respect. They were never herded with the common felon, the fratricide, the murderer, the thief. We have only come to that in these later days, this enlightened nineteenth century. But this is no place to set down so-called sensational details. This is no

political pamphlet, and the writer is no Nihilist. But surely there are some Englishmen who find time to study this great question; some who know that a Nihilist is not a Terrorist, nor a Socialist, nor an Atheist, but merely, if you please, a politician—a man who loves his country sufficiently well to risk all for her sake. In all changes there is a time when crime is turned to heroism. To-day the Nihilists are criminals, some day they will be heroes. To-day Nihil merely represents the fruit that they gather from their seed, but in times to come one cannot help hoping that there will be a mighty harvest. And then perhaps the gatherers—the new Russian nation that will spring up and flourish from the ashes of the old autocracy—will remember those who sowed in tears and tribulation; will remember those nameless thousands of men and women who have died in solitary cell, in dripping darksome mine, in prison-hospital, and on the great road to Siberia.

In England the whole question of the future of Russia is as little studied as its present state is known. Nihilism at present is a subject to write novels about —the dramatic side of it alone is brought before the public; and consequently the cause of Progression, ay, the cause of personal freedom, each man's birthright, is treated as a huge fiction. A few read the

sparse books here and there written by Russians who are in deadly earnest, but fewer still take it as it is, namely, a downright practical fact. It is a great fight, and though the picturesque part of it only is presented in fiction, just as the picturesque side of Poland was a few years ago turned into fictional capital, there is another—the earnest steady pressing forward of an ever-increasing party of men and women who daily make stupendous sacrifices for the cause that binds them together.

The picturesqueness requires distance. One must contemplate the drama to appreciate its force, and take no part in it. It is very thrilling and very picturesque to conjure up in the mind's eye a gloomy cell, with glistening walls and a wooden bed, without even a handful of straw; but the denizen of that cell fails to see the dramatic force of it all. There is a certain excitement in imagining a snow-covered plain traversed by one dirty, deeply-rutted road, and to set thereon a string of miserable beings, dragging one leg after another—their backs turned towards home and all they love, their horror-stricken eyes looking on hopeless exile. But there is no excitement in standing at the edge of that road and watching with living eyes those same poor human beings in the flesh. There is no dramatic thrill in standing at the

side of a miserable pallet infested with vermin, reeking with damp, and watching the last throes of a repulsive heap of dirt and rags which was once a comely, fair young girl. And these are realities, they are no sensational details. The details of Siberian prison life and exile life are not sensational—they are merely beastly.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS WINTER DIVERGES.

"My dear Oswin,

"If you want to carry out this theatre-party, come and see me about it. I shall be at home all the morning.

"Yours very truly,

"Agnes Winter."

The young sailor read this letter among others at the breakfast-table. His father and sister were engaged on their own affairs; Helen with her letters, the admiral among his newspapers. Oswin Grace read the letter twice, and then with a glance to see that he was unobserved by his sister, he slipped it into his pocket together with the envelope that had contained it.

"Have you," said Helen, immediately afterwards, "a letter from Agnes?"

"Yes," he replied, opening a second missive with airy indifference. "She wants me to arrange about

the theatre. I shall go round and see her this morning—will you come with me?"

The girl raised her eyebrows almost imperceptibly. There had been a time when he would have schemed unscrupulously to go alone.

"I am afraid," she answered, quietly, "that I cannot go out this morning. I have so much to do in the house."

"You had better come."

"If you will put it off to this afternoon I should like to," she replied.

"No; I am engaged this afternoon."

"Where?" inquired the admiral without raising his eyes from the newspaper.

"At the docks—with Tyars."

There was nothing more said, and at eleven o'clock Oswin went out alone. The fog and gloom of late November had given place to a bright, dry cold, and this, without any great fall in the thermometer, now held complete sway over mud and water.

Miss Winter's elderly maid-servant evidently expected Lieutenant Grace, for she opened the door and stood back invitingly. Then when he was in the hall unbuttoning his thick pilot coat, she informed him that Miss Agnes was out, but was to return in a few moments. He was ushered up into the warm,

luxurious drawing-room, and after the door had been closed, stood for a few moments irresolute in the middle of the deep carpet. Presently he began to wander about the room, taking things up and setting them down again. He inhaled the subtle atmosphere of feminine home refinement and looked curiously round him. There were a hundred little personalities, little inconsidered feminine trifles that are only found where a woman is quite at home. The very arrangement of the room proved that it was a woman's room, that a woman lived her every-day life there, and set her indefinable subtle stamp upon everything. There was a silly little lace handkerchief, utterly useless and vain, lying upon a table beside a work-basket. He took it up, examined its texture critically, and then instinctively raised it to his face. He threw it down again with a peculiar twisted smile.

"Wonder what scent it is," he muttered. "I have never come across it—anywhere else."

He went towards the mantel-piece; upon it were two portraits—old photographs, somewhat faded. One of Helen, the other of himself. He examined his own likeness for some moments.

"Solemn little beggar," he said, for the photograph was of a little square-built midshipman with a long oval face. "Solemn little beggar; wonder

what his end will be? Wonder why he is on this mantel-piece?"

Then he continued his mental inventory, stopping finally on the hearthrug with his back turned towards the fire, his hands thrust into the side-pockets of his short blue serge jacket.

"I think," he reflected aloud, "that I was rather a fool to come here. Tyars would not like it."

While he was still following out the train of thought suggested by this reflection the door opened and Miss Winter entered. She had evidently just come in, for she was still gloved and furred.

"Ah!" she said, gaily; "you have come. I was afraid that your exacting commander would require your services all the morning."

"My exacting commander," he answered, as he took her gloved hand in his, "has a peculiar way of doing everything himself and leaving his subordinates idle."

She was standing before him slowly unbuttoning her trim little sealskin jacket. Then she drew off her gloves and threw them down on a chair beside her jacket. There was about her movements that subtle sense of feminine luxury which is slightly bewildering to men unaccustomed to English home-life. The cold bright air had brought a glow of colour to

her rounded cheeks; she might easily have been a lovely girl of twenty-one. But there was a fascination in her which was equal to that of youth, if not superior—the fascination of perfect self-possession, of perfect *savoir faire.* She seemed singularly sure of herself, quite certain as to what she was going to say or do next. She seemed to know how to make the best of life, how to laugh in the right places, and work and play; and perhaps she knew how to love if she set her mind that way.

"The delicate daughter," she said, cheerily, "of the genial milkman has been suddenly taken worse. I knew that meant jelly, so I took it round at once with last week's *Graphic,* and got it over. I hope I have not kept you waiting?"

"Oh, no; thanks," he replied.

It almost seemed that he was not quite at ease with his old playmate—the companion of his childhood, the little sweetheart of his "Britannia" days. If this was so the change was all on his side, for she persistently treated him with that sisterly familiarity which has led so many of us into mistakes that might be ludicrous if they only did not leave such a nasty sting behind them.

She approached the mirror above the mantelpiece, and in continuance of her sisterly treatment,

proceeded placidly to draw out the long pins from her hat, while he watched the deft play of her fingers.

"I have been wandering round the room," he continued, resolutely turning away, "looking for old friends."

"You have scarcely been in this room," she said, without looking round, "since you came back."

"No-o-o! I found a little thimble in the top of your work-basket. Do you remember how we used to make indigestible little loaves of bread and cook them in a thimble over the gas?"

"Yes," she laughed, "it is the same thimble. It fits me still."

She held up for his edification a small dimpled hand with clever capable little fingers bent coquettishly backwards. He gave a short laugh, and took no notice of the tempting fingers. Then, having removed her hat, she knelt down in front of the fire to warm herself.

"What," she said suddenly, "about this expedition?"

He looked back at her over his shoulder, for he had gone towards the window, and there was a sudden gleam of determination in his eyes. It was her influence that had disturbed Tyars' resolution.

"What expedition?" he asked, curtly, on his guard.

"This theatre expedition," she replied, sweetly.

"Oh, well; I suppose it will be carried through. We all want to go."

"We—all?" she said, inquiringly.

He came nearer to her, standing actually on the hearthrug beside her and looking down.

"Helen," he explained, "and Tyars, and myself, and Easton, I believe."

She gave a little nod at the mention of each name, tallying them off in her mind.

"And," he continued, "I suppose you are not strongly opposed to it?"

"I," she laughed lightly; "of course I want to go. You know that I am always ready for amusement, profitless or otherwise — profitless preferred! Why do you look so grave, Oswin? Please don't—I hate solemnity. Do you know you have got horribly grave lately? It is . . ."

"It is what, Agnes?"

He was looking down at her with his keen, close-set gray eyes, and she met his glance for a moment only.

"Mr. Tyars," she answered, clasping her fingers

together and bending them backwards as if to restore the circulation after her cold walk.

"There is something," said Grace, after a little pause, during which Miss Winter had continued to rub a remarkably rosy little pair of hands together, "that jars. Tyars annoys you in some way."

Miss Winter changed colour. She looked very girlish with the hot blush fading slowly from her cheeks. She did not however make any answer.

"What is it?" asked Grace. "His energy?"

"No-o," slowly, with a faint suggestion of coquetry.

"His gravity?"

"No."

"His independence?"

"I like men to be energetic, grave, and independent. All men should be so."

"Then what is it?" asked Oswin.

She made no answer.

"Won't you tell me, Agnes?" he urged; and as he spoke he walked away from her and stood looking out of the window. They were thus at opposite sides of the room, back to back. She glanced over her shoulder, drew in a deep breath, and then spoke with an odd little smile which was almost painful. One would almost have thought that she was going to tell a lie.

"His Arctic expeditions," she said, deliberately. "If he is going to spend his life in that sort of thing I would rather—not—cultivate—his friendship."

She leant forward, warming her hands feverishly, breathing rapidly and unevenly. She felt him approach, for his footsteps were inaudible on the thick carpet, and she only crouched a little lower. At last, after a horrid silence, he spoke, and his voice was quite different; it was deeper and singularly monotonous.

"Why should you not wish to cultivate his friendship under those circumstances?"

"Because," she answered, lamely, "I should hate to have a friend of mine—a real friend—running the risk of such a horrible death."

He walked away to the window again and stood there with his hands thrust into his jacket-pockets—a sturdy, square little man—a plucky, self-contained Englishman, taking his punishment without a word. He was, as has been stated, rather ignorant in the ways of women. Most naval men are. And he fell into the trap blindly. He was actually foolish enough to believe that Agnes Winter loved Claud Tyars, and he was ignorant enough to believe that a woman ever tells one man of her love for another. It seems almost incredible that he should do this. It is only

men who make such mistakes as regards human nature.

As a man of honour he had carefully schooled himself to show this lady by every action, word, and gesture that if he had at one time been moved to regard her with other than the eyes of a brother, that time was passed. This was the least he could do in honour towards her, in faith towards Claud Tyars. Whether he succeeded or not could only be known to Agnes Winter herself. But, to judge from the expression of his face, from the contracted pain of his eyes as he stood looking down into the quiet street, it would seem that he had not been prepared to hear from her own lips that this woman, whom he had loved all his life, loved another man. The news, coming suddenly as it did, almost threw him off his mental equilibrium. This nauseating sense of unsteadiness in a great purpose is probably not quite unknown to the majority of us. It is so easy to make up one's mind to a noble sacrifice and to give entire attention to the larger duties attending on it. Then comes some sudden unforeseen demand upon our self-suppression; sometimes it is almost trivial, and yet it leaves us shaken and uncertain.

Oswin remembered the jealous pangs with which he first saw these two together. Subsequent events

had disarmed his jealousy and allayed his fears. Even now he could not realize what she had told him. And yet he was mad enough to believe it. Moreover, he continued to believe it. It was only at a subsequent period that he began to doubt and to analyze, and then it was clear enough to him. It was clear that in implying she had in no way committed herself. He had understood her to confess that she was on the verge of falling in love with this nineteenth-century knight-errant, and yet she had made no such confession. It is probable that in that later season he remembered the words and not the manner of saying them. For, after all, the most important thing is not what we say, but how we say it. Do we not say every day the same trivial things that were said in Pompeii? Do we scribblers not write the same silly old story over and over again? Do we not smear the gilt over the same stale old gingerbread, and try to make inexperienced young folks believe that it is solid gold, just as our predecessors endeavoured to persuade us?

Suddenly Oswin Grace seemed to recall himself to the matter-of-fact question under discussion.

"That," he said, "is the worst of making friends. One is bound to drift away from them. But still it is foolish to hold aloof on that account."

She laughed in rather a strained way.

"Our maritime philosopher," she said, "will now expound a maxim. Ex-pound. Derivation—to pound out."

"Shall I get the tickets?" he asked in a practical way.

"Please."

"Well, then, I will go off at once and book them."

He shook hands and left her standing in the middle of the room.

"Perhaps," she murmured regretfully, "it was very cruel—or it may be only my own self-conceit. At all events it was not so cruel as they are to Helen. I do not think that they will *both* go now."

CHAPTER V.

GREEK AND GREEK.

SCARCELY had the front door closed behind Oswin Grace when the bell was rung again.

Miss Winter standing in the drawing-room heard the tones of a man's voice, and in a few moments the maid knocked and came into the drawing-room.

"A gentleman, please, Miss; a Mr. Easton," she said, doubtfully.

"Mr. Easton," repeated Agnes Winter, catching the inflection of doubt. For a moment she forgot who this might be.

"He gave his full name, Miss," added the servant with faltering gravity.

"Oh."

"Mr. Matthew Mark Easton."

"Of course—show him up at once."

Matthew Mark Easton had evidently devoted some care to the question of dress on this occasion. Some extra care perhaps, for he was a peculiarly neat man. He always wore a narrow silk tie in the form of a

bow of which the ends were allowed to stick straight out sideways, over the waistcoat. His coat was embellished by an orchid.

"I am afraid," he began at once, with perfect equanimity, "that I have made a mistake—a social blunder."

"How so?" inquired Miss Winter, smiling her ready smile.

"I do not think that your hired girl expected visitors at this time in the morning," he replied, waiting obviously for her to take a seat.

"I am afraid Ann is rather eccentric," began the lady, apologetically, but he stopped her with a laugh.

"Oh no!" he said, "she did not think that I had come about the gas-meter, or anything like that. But her face is expressive if homely; plain, I mean."

"I hope that it only expressed polite surprise."

"That was all," he replied, laying on the table a few beautiful flowers which he had been carrying loose in his hand. There were orchids and white lilac and pale heliotrope. "I brought you these," he explained, "but I did not come on purpose to bring them. I came on business, so to speak. I have noticed that when Englishmen are by way of being sociable, when they are going to a dance or a theatre or to make calls, they always carry a flower in their

button-hole, so I bought one. I thought it would explain to your domestic servant that I had come to call, but she perhaps failed to see my flower. When I was buying it, I saw these other ones and—and thought they would look nice in your parlour."

He looked round him in his formal American way, and interrupted her thanks by saying that it was a very pretty room.

She rose, and taking up the delicate flowers proceeded at once to place them in water.

"I came," he then explained, "to inform you that I have secured a box, the stage-box, for Wednesday night, at the Epic Theatre. It will be doing me a pleasure if you will form one of my party."

Still engaged with the flowers, Miss Winter began thanking him vaguely without actually accepting.

"I do not know," he said, "exactly how these things are managed in England, but I want Miss Grace and her brother to come as my guests too. Miss Grace was kind enough to ask me to be one of a theatre party, and mentioned the Epic, so I went right away and got a box."

"Oswin has just gone to procure seats for the same night," said Miss Winter, quickly.

"No," replied the American; "I stopped him. I met him in the street."

Miss Winter knew that they must have met actually on her doorstep, and she wondered why he should have deliberately made a misstatement. She felt indefinitely guilty, as if Oswin's visit had been surreptitious. Suddenly she became aware of the quick flitting glance of her companion's eyes, noting everything—each tiny flicker of the eyelids, each indrawn breath, each slightest movement.

"How am I to do it?" he asked, innocently. "A note to Miss Grace, or a verbal invitation to her brother?"

"A note," replied Miss Winter, with a gravity equal to his own, "to Helen, saying that you have secured the stage-box for Wednesday evening, and hope that she and her brother will accept seats in it."

He nodded his head, signifying comprehension, and rose to go.

"Thank you," he said; "in America we would not be so circumlocutory. We would say, 'Dear Miss Grace, will you come to the theatre with self and friends on Wednesday?' But I am anxious to do what is right over here. I respect your British institutions and your domestic servants; the two hold together right through. Half the institutions are adhered to on account of the servants. Half your

British gentlemen dress for dinner because their butler puts on a claw-hammer coat for the same. Half your ladies wash their hands for lunch because the hired girl has taken up a tin of hot water."

"And in America," said Miss Winter, who had not risen from her seat, "you have no respect for your servants?"

"Not much—we pretend we have. We pretend that we are all equal, and of course we are not. We think that we are very simple, and we are in reality very complex. Our social life is so complicated as to be almost impossible. No; you are the simplest people on earth, because you like doing exactly what your immediate ancestors did. We are not content with a generation, we must go farther back for our model, or else we have no model at all, but try to be one."

"I think," said Miss Winter, "that you are more conscious of yourselves than we are. I do not mean self-conscious; it is not so strong as that. You are self-analytical."

"Yes," answered Easton, still lingering, although he did not take a seat in obedience to her evident wish. "We feel our own feelings; we think about our own thoughts; *nous nous écoutons* mentally."

"As a nation?" she inquired, with some interest.

"Yes, as a nation. We think, and talk, and write about our national morals, about the evolution of the national mind. You have nothing in common but your political wrangles."

"England," said Miss Winter, without disparagement, indeed with a sort of pride, "is the only country that does not talk of Progress, and write it with a capital P."

Matthew Mark Easton came back again towards the fire-place; like all Americans, he loved comparisons.

"Progress," he said, "spelt as you suggest is a disease. It fixed itself upon England in the days of your virgin queen; you have lived it down, and are all the stronger now for having been affected. We got it next, and I surmise that we had it badly. France is suffering now, and she has had a still sharper attack, so sharp that surgery came into play —the knife—the knife they called the guillotine. Russia is the next upon the list; she will have it worst of all, her surgery will be effected with a dirty axe."

"Your mention of Russia," said Miss Winter, skipping away from the subject under discussion with all the inconsequence of her sex and kind, "reminds

me of something I heard said of you the other evening. It was, in fact, said to me."

"Then," replied the American, with cheery gallantry, "I should like to hear it. Had it been said to any one else I allow that I should have been indifferent."

He stood with his hands clasped behind his back, looking down at her with a smile upon his wistful little face.

"Do you know Mr. Santow?"

The smile vanished, and the dancing eyes at once assumed an expression of alert keenness, which was almost ludicrous in its contrast.

"The Russian *attaché*—unaccredited?" he replied, giving back question for question.

Miss Winter nodded her head.

"No—" he said, slowly; "I do not; I think I know him by sight."

"I have met him on several occasions. I rather like him, although I cannot understand him. There is an inward Mr. Santow whom I have not met yet; I only know a creature who smiles and behaves generally like a lamb."

"Santow," said Easton, deliberately, "is altogether too guileless."

Miss Winter countered sharply.

"I thought you did not know him?"

"I do not," answered Easton, imperturbably.

"Except by reputation?"

"Precisely."

"He is reputed," said Miss Winter, "to be a great diplomatist."

"So I believe—hence the lamb-like manners."

Easton's face was a study in the art of suppressing curiosity.

"Do you think that he is a wolf in lamb's clothing?" asked the lady with a laugh.

"No; I think he is an ass, if you will excuse a slight mixture of metaphor."

Miss Winter laughed again in a light-hearted, irresponsible way.

"I will tell you," she said, "what he said about you."

"Thank you."

"We were talking about Russia—it is his favourite topic—and he said that at times he felt like the envoy from some heathen country, so little is Russia known by us. By way of illustration he asked me to look round the room and tell him if it did not contain all that was most intellectual and learned in England. I admitted that he was right. He said, 'And yet there are but two men in the room who

speak Russian.' Then he pointed you out. 'That is one,' he said; 'he knows my country better than any man in England. If he were a diplomatist I should fear him!' 'What is he?' I asked, and he merely shrugged his shoulders in that guileless way to which you object."

Matthew Mark Easton did not appear to be much impressed. He moved from one foot to the other and took considerable interest in the pattern of the carpet.

"And," he inquired, "did he mention the name of the second accomplished person?"

"No."

"I wonder who it was?" said Easton.

"Mr. Tyars," suggested the lady, calmly.

"Possibly. By the way, I thought of asking him to join us on Wednesday at the Epic."

"I hope," said Miss Winter, with a gracious little bow, "that he will be able to come."

"'Dear Miss Grace,'" began Easton, solemnly, as if repeating a lesson, "'I have secured the stage-box at the Epic for Wednesday evening next, and hope that you and your brother will do me the pleasure of accepting seats in it.' Will that do?"

"Very nicely."

"And I may count on you?"

"Yes; you may count on me."

"Thank you," he said, simply, and took his departure.

As he walked rapidly eastward towards the club where he was expecting to meet Tyars, his quaint little face was wrinkled up into a thousand interrogations.

"Yes," he said, at length, with a knowing nod, "it was a warning; that spry little lady smells a rat. How does she know that Tyars speaks Russian? He is not the sort of fellow to boast of his accomplishments. She must have heard it from Grace, and to hear from him she must have asked, because Grace is more than half inclined to be jealous of Tyars, and would take care not to remove the bushel from his light."

For some time he walked on whistling a tune softly. Cheerfulness is only a habit. He did not really feel cheerful, nor particularly inclined for music. Then he began reflecting in an undertone again.

"Here I am," he said, "in a terrible fright of two women; all my schemes may be upset by either of them, and I do not know which to fear most—that clever little lady with her sharp wits, or that girl's

eyes. I almost think Miss Helen's eyes are the more dangerous; I am sure they would be if it was my affair—if it was me whom those quiet eyes followed about. But it is not; it is Tyars. Now I wonder—I wonder if he knows it?"

CHAPTER VI

EASTON'S BOX.

It occasionally happens to the most astute of us to act, and even take some trouble over our action without quite knowing why we do so. There is a little motive called human impulse which at times upsets the deepest calculations. Not one of us has met a man or woman whose every action and every word was the result of forethought, and consequently fraught with a deeper meaning and a fuller design than would appear upon the surface. Such persons do exist, of course—because the lady novelist tells us so. There can be no doubt of it. I merely venture to observe that in our small way we have not met them yet in the flesh.

Had the keen-witted Easton been asked why he felt impelled to disburse ten guineas for the benefit of the lessee of the Epic Theatre he would scarcely have been able to make an immediate reply. In his rapid airy fashion he had picked up and pieced

together certain little bits of evidence tending to prove that the young people with whom he found himself on somewhat sudden terms of intimacy were exceedingly partial to each other's society. As may have been gathered from his own outspoken reflections, he had drawn certain conclusions respecting Helen Grace. He had never known women intimately, and to him as to many in the same position the feelings of a woman were something almost sacred. I must even ask you to believe that he held the quaint old-fashioned opinion that it is man's duty to spare women as much as possible—to make their way here among the rocks as smooth as they can—to be gallant and gentle—to be brave for them and to fear for them—to look upon them as a frail and delicate and beautiful treasure placed into their hands to cherish and to love; to be proud of. Ha! ha! How funny it sounds! How ludicrous! Try and realize that men like you and me once held these views in good earnest—that there are even a few holding them now. But of course the rest of us know better. We know that in treasuring and cherishing we insult a being whose soul is higher than ours, whose intellect would be loftier than ours had it freedom to soar, whose mere physical inferiority in the matter of brute force is a question of

training and of athletic exercise. Is it possible to be gallant and gentle to a being however lovely who can get up on the first platform and pour forth a stream of eloquence, of reason, and of argument, or to one who can sit down and write a slashing article for an advanced magazine dealing with the realistic side of human life boldly, and without fear? *Merci!* Not for me. Let us admit our inferiority at once. Our slow tongues cleave to the roof of our mouth at the thought of debate—our halting pens splutter at the brink of realism.

In this respect, then, it must be admitted that Matthew Mark Easton was behind the times. He was one of the millions of men who never read those slashing articles, and never attend the animated debates; one of the millions who stay at home, and read the comic papers—who are content with facts and ignore fancies. He had only once met a modern woman. It was on the occasion of an intellectual gathering whither he had repaired in the hopes of meeting a great Russian novelist. As soon as he entered the room his quick eyes detected her—a very plain woman, large and clumsy, short-sighted, and shockingly dressed. Her chief outward signs of greatness were an aggressive eagerness of manner and a deep-seated sense of self-satisfaction.

"What," inquired Easton very gravely of a friend, "in the name of goodness is that thing?"

On receiving a detailed reply, he added, with the same imperturbable solemnity—

"Then take it away—send it off in a hired carriage—I don't like it."

And from that day forth he treated the whole question of woman's rights with the same reprehensible levity. For him the leaven failed to affect the whole, and he continued to hold his strange old-world views of womankind.

He had no desire to pry into the secrets of Helen's heart. Such curiosity would have been unmanly and cowardly. But he simply looked upon Claud Tyars as a man who was different from the others for Helen Grace. We know what it means, some of us—that difference; for most of us have known a man or woman who was different from the others.

Under the circumstances his simple creed was avoidance. He was no Stoic, this little American. He held no mistaken opinions as to the powers of endurance vouchsafed to the human heart. Being physically delicate, his perception was keener and his knowledge of women subtler than that of a strong man like Claud Tyars. He was however eminently

practical. Claud Tyars and Helen Grace were clearly called upon by the force of circumstances to avoid each other. If they declined to take the initiative, force must be used. Under the same circumstances Matthew Mark Easton would have acted up to his own creed with a steady sense of purpose amounting to more than stoicism.

And yet he deliberately took a box at the theatre and invited the two young people to join his party. On reflection he realized suddenly that the two other members of the party were in an almost similar position. In his anxiety respecting Tyars he had quite overlooked the danger to which he was exposing Oswin Grace. He himself was the fifth man—an alternative third, likely to be ill received by either couple. He tried to persuade himself that the theatre scheme would have been unconditionally carried through despite any efforts of his, and that as his guests he would be able to manage these people much better than he could have done as a guest of theirs. But he was distinctly sensible of the fact that there was in reality no question of management, and that in practice his influence over any of the persons implicated was remarkably small.

On the evening fixed Easton took care to be early on the scene of action. It had been his intention to

invite Tyars to dine with him, but on reflection he abandoned this hospitable sheme. A general rendez-vous at the theatre was more formal, and would put the whole affair in the light of a bachelor's return for hospitality received, rather than the gathering to-gether of close friends. This distinction was subtle; but without such powers of distinguishing no man gets very far on in the world. The human career is one long effort at distinction, one long choice between that which is good and that which is evil, between things profitable and unprofitable.

Matthew Mark Easton was leisurely surveying the half-empty house when Miss Winter, Helen Grace, and Oswin were shown into the box by an official. His quick glance detected a momentary droop of Helen's eyelids. A blundering man would have made some reference to Tyars' lateness of arrival. Easton did no such thing. He proceeded to draw forward chairs for the ladies, and did the honours with a certain calm ease which in no way savoured of familiarity.

"I should like," said Miss Winter, untying the ribbon of a jaunty little opera-cloak, "the darkest corner."

"Why?" asked Helen, almost sharply.

"Because the piece is said to be very touching, and I invariably weep."

"Sorry," said Easton; "sorry it cannot be done. But I can lend you a huge pair of opera-glasses."

"But," urged Miss Winter, "my tears *drop*—audibly on the programme."

"We want the dark corners for the men—the background," urged the American, holding a chair invitingly. "We love the shadow—eh, Grace?"

"Speak for yourself," said that sailor bluntly, pulling forward a second chair and seating himself immediately behind Miss Winter.

Things were not going well. There was a vacant chair close to that occupied by Helen Grace. Easton looked at it for a moment and then deliberately brought another forward from the back of the box. At this moment the orchestra ceased, and the curtain ran smoothly up. All turned their eyes towards the stage, but the two ladies glanced occasionally over their shoulders as if in expectation of a new arrival. Matthew Mark Easton saw these glances, but his imperturbable little smile concealed whatever thoughts may have been passing through his mind. The manager of the Epic Theatre never allowed a farce upon his stage. The first play this evening was a little story of Coppée's skilfully translated. Like most of that Frenchman's productions, the interest of this play gathered and culminated. Half unwillingly the

four occupants of the stage-box allowed themselves to become interested. When at last the curtain dropped Claud Tyars was standing behind them; he had entered the box unheard and unnoticed.

During the greetings that followed, more than one person observed that he looked somewhat stronger, somewhat larger than ever, but that in his face there was a difference. It lay, perhaps, in the fact that a greater portion of sunburn had been bleached out of his skin by the gloom of an English winter. Oswin Grace was, curiously enough, reminded at that moment of a very different scene. For a second there arose in his mind a vivid recollection of the moss-grown deck of the *Martial*, and of this same face, these same deep eyes looking at him from beneath the tattered brim of an old Panama hat. The two scenes were as unlike as could well be; but in the glare of the pitiless electric light there was a momentary flash of stubborn energy which the young sailor had only seen in one pair of eyes before, under the scorching rays of a tropical sun. It may, of course, have been nothing else than a very natural contraction of the eyelids under a glare of light, but it imparted to the man's face a restless, hunted expression quite out of keeping with his placid manner.

Oswin resumed his seat beside Miss Winter as

unostentatiously as possible. Easton and Tyars were thus left standing side by side. Helen, who was half turned towards them, glanced up thoughtfully from time to time. The contrast they afforded might well have struck a less observant onlooker. The girl raised her lace fan so that she might watch them unobtrusively. In outward appearance the two men could scarcely have been less similar. One tall, rather fair, and singularly quiet; the other small, nervous, quick, and dark. The one was eminently and undoubtedly an athlete, the outturn of English public school and university; the other frail and intellectual. He might possess deftness, nimbleness, skill, but in the nervous limbs there could be no great strength. They almost looked like beings of a different creation, and yet they were what we vaguely call "chums." Tyars was wont to speak of his "friend Easton" in a careless Britannic way, while the American talked of "Old Tyars" with undisguised affection.

Chance observers in the other parts of the theatre glanced at the stage-box, noted the presence of two beautiful women, and some perhaps looked beyond the two gracious heads. If such there were, they probably passed on with a mere mental comment respecting the big, fine-looking fellow and the insignificant little man at his side. No one would have

associated them in a joint labour, no one would have put them down as Quixotic law-breakers. It is so easy, you see, to conspire, so simple to break the law if you have only a decent coat upon your back.

But the girl who was watching them close at hand had no suspicion of aught concealed from her. She only knew that they were singular men, that they were the only two who had yet crossed the pathway of of her young life without raising their eyes from the road they trod. With the intuition of her sex she had unconsciously found the one characteristic possessed by both. Without analysis, without study it had come to her. She was simply aware of it—the knowledge had crept into her soul stealthily. She knew that they were equally possessed of an abnormal strength of purpose. Then she found herself wondering what the mental attitude of each might be towards the other. She had seen them together frequently, it is true, but they were not effusive. They almost ignored each other. There was something in their attitudes, as they stood side by side without speaking, which told Helen in plainer language that they were friends than any social intercourse had hitherto demonstrated. She wondered vaguely in which mind was hidden the initiative, in which the executive, and by natural transition she glided on to mental question as to how

each and both would act in a crisis, in a moment of physical or moral danger. For maidens, I take it, are little altered since those brave days when gentlemen were knights. I believe that they still would wish us to be upright and fearless before the world. It boots not that we be very clever or very intellectual, great musicians, artists, writers; but they would have us gentle towards themselves, very cool, and quite ready in moments of danger. They would have us readier with our hands than with our tongues, strong and simple—manly.

It was rather strange that Helen Grace should have had these thoughts just then. Later on, when she could remember anything at all, she recollected them and wondered if it was really a mere coincidence.

For some time the two men stood, each declining to make the first move. There were two chairs, but one had a distinct advantage over the other. At last Easton pointed to the seat close to Helen.

"Will you sit there, Tyars?" he said hospitably.

One great fault in Matthew Mark Easton was soft-heartedness. He was one of those mistaken men who hesitate to punish a dog.

"Thank you," said the Englishman, appropriating the chair nonchalantly.

"It appears," continued Easton, who was be-

ginning to fear that Tyars was in a silent mood, "that the piece is touching. We shall require your moral support; that calm exterior of yours will, I surmise, assist us materially to keep a serene countenance turned towards the stalls."

"Don't be personal," replied the Englishman. "You may rely upon me at the pathetic parts. It is some years since I wept."

"The last time I did it," said the American, thoughtfully, "was when I got my ears boxed because another fellow broke a window."

Helen and Miss Winter laughed. They all felt that there was a hitch somewhere. They were conversationally lame and halt.

"We both told untruths about it," continued Easton, determined to work this mine to its deepest. "But mine failed while his succeeded. That was why I wept. Mine was not an artistic lie, I admit; but it might have got through with a little good luck. There is nothing so humiliating as an unsuccessful attempt to pervert the truth. Have you not found that so, Miss Winter? But of course you would not know. I apologize; I am sorry. Of course you never tell them."

"Oh yes," said the lady candidly, "I do."

At this moment the curtain was drawn up, and

Miss Winter broke off suddenly in the midst of her confession, turning towards the stage and settling herself comfortably to watch the play. In so doing she unconsciously drew her chair a little farther away from Helen, and thus left her and Claud Tyars more distinctly apart.

This was scarcely noticeable during the act, which was of a thrilling and absorbing nature; but when the curtain fell again it was suddenly obvious to them both that they could now talk in slightly lowered tones without being overheard.

CHAPTER VII.

AN EMERGENCY.

THE effect of the discovery that they distinctly formed a group apart was barely visible to the keenest glance. Helen's slow gentle eyes were turned towards the centre of the house, bent vaguely on the brightly-dressed occupants of the stalls.

Tyars took up a programme and began studying it.

"Who is the man," he said, "playing the villain? I am frightfully ignorant in theatrical matters."

"He is good, is he not?" said the girl, mentioning the actor's name.

"Yes. He is unconscious of being a villain, which touch of nature makes him very human."

Helen seemed to be rather struck with these words spoken indifferently with down-turned eyes.

"Are villains in real life unconscious of their villainy?" she asked at length, with perfunctory interest.

"I do not know," he answered, with a pre-occupation which saved his manner from being actually rude; "I should think so—yes—certainly."

He raised his head, and the effort with which he avoided looking towards her was probably detected by the gentle gray eyes.

There was a little silence: hardly irksome because the invisible orchestra was now in full blast.

"I suppose," said Helen, closing her fan, "that all this is rather trivial for you. The interest you take in it must be superficial now that you are so busy."

"Oh no!" Tyars hastened to begin; he was looking past her in that strangely persistent way into the theatre, and something he saw there made him turn his head quickly towards the stage.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. Then he caught her wrist in his grasp. "Keep still," he whispered.

The painted curtain was bellying right forward like the mainsail of a barque, and from the space at either side a sudden volume of smoke poured forth in huge uneven clouds.

In a second the whole audience was on its feet, and for a moment a sickening silence reigned—the breathless silence of supreme fear.

Then a single form appeared on the stage. It

was that of the man referred to by Claud Tyars a moment before; he who played the villain's part so unconsciously. He was still in his dark wig and pallid make-up. On his arm he carried the coat he had just taken off, and the other arm clad in white shirt-sleeve was raised in a gesture of command.

"I must ask you," he cried, in a full clear voice, "to leave your seats as . . ."

And his tones were drowned, completely overwhelmed by a strange unearthly roar; the roar of a thousand human voices raised in one surging wail of despair, like the din of surf upon a shingle shore.

The man shouted, and his gestures were almost ludicrous even at that supreme moment, for no sound could be heard from his lips.

Then the gas was turned out, and in the darkness a terrible struggle began. Some who came out of it could liken it to nothing on earth, but they said that they had gained a clearer comprehension of what hell might be. Women shrieked and men forgot themselves—blaspheming aloud.

As the gas flickered and finally collapsed, those in the stage-box caught a momentary vision of wild distorted faces coming towards them. The pit had overflowed the stalls. Strong barriers crumbled like matchwood. Into a hundred minds at once there

had flashed the hope of escape through the stage-boxes.

"Grace! Easton!" It was Tyars' voice raised, and yet not shouting. The crisis had come, the danger was at hand, and Helen knew who it was that would take the lead.

She heard the two men answer.

"Keep the people back. I will break open the door on to the stage; it is our best chance."

The girl felt herself lifted from the ground and carried to the back of the box.

"Helen!" whispered Tyars.

"Yes!"

"Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"I thought you had fainted, you were so quiet! Hold on to my coat! Never leave go of that!"

He turned away from her, and above the din and uproar came the sound of his blows upon the woodwork of the door. It seemed impossible that such strokes could have been dealt by an unarmed human hand.

Between the blows came the sickening sound of the struggle at the front of the box. Imprecations, blasphemy, and supplications, mingled with groans and the dull thud of merciless fists upon human

faces. Shoulder to shoulder the two men—the American and the Englishman—fought for the lives of the women placed by the hand of God under their protection. It was a terrible task, though few women reached the front of the box. Each man struck down, each assailant beaten back was doomed, and the defenders knew it. Once down, once underfoot, and it was a matter of moments.

Fresh assailants came crowding on, treading on the fallen and consequently obtaining an ever-increasing advantage as they rose on a level with the defenders. Neither seemed to question the wisdom of Tyars' command. It was a matter of life or death. Those already in the stage-box would only be crushed by the onrush of the others were they allowed to enter. With a dazed desperation the two men faced the frightful odds, hammering wildly with both fists. Their arms ached from sheer hard work, and they panted hoarsely. Their eyeballs throbbed with the effort to pierce unfathomable darkness. It was quite certain that their defence could not last long.

"Stick to it!" yelled Tyars. He might have been on the deck of the *Martial* during a white squall, so great was the uproar all round him.

At last there was the sound of breaking wood.

"Grace!" shouted the voice of Tyars.

"Yes."

"Look after Miss Winter when we go."

"Right."

"Easton!" he cried again.

"Yes, old man!"

"Come last, and keep them back if you can."

Then a minute later he shouted, "Come!"

At the same instant the roaring crowd of madmen poured in over the low front of the box, like soldiers storming a bastion. The door which Tyars had succeeded in opening was so narrow as to admit of the passage of only one person at a time, but at this instant the larger door leading into a narrow passage, the real exit from the stage-box, broke down before a pressure from without, and from this point also a stream of half-demented beings tried to force an entrance.

The only advantage possessed by the original occupants of the box was that they knew the position of the small door.

The subsequent recollections of such individuals as survived were so fragmentary and vague that no connected story of the terrible tragedy in the stage-box of the Epic Theatre was ever given to the public.

Miss Winter remembered finding herself caught up in a strong pair of arms, which she presumed to be those of Oswin Grace. Almost at the same moment she and her protector were thrown to the ground. After that the next thing she could remember was the touch of a hand over her face and hair, and a whispered voice in her ear—

"Agnes Winter—is this you?"

She recognized the peculiar American twang which was never unpleasant. At that moment she almost laughed.

"Yes—yes," she answered.

"Then crawl to your left. Don't try to get up—crawl over this man. I don't know who he is, but I surmise he is dead."

She obeyed, and found her way out of the narrow door and up some steps. Close behind her followed some one, whom she took to be Matthew Mark Easton, but it ultimately turned out to be Oswin Grace, who was in his turn followed by the American, but not until later.

Helen Grace heard the word "come," and submitted obediently to the supporting arm which half dragged, half carried her up some steps. She remembered being carried like a child, through some darksome place where the atmosphere was cold and

damp. Then she was conscious of a halt, followed closely by the sound of breaking wood and the tearing of some material—probably canvas, for they were among the scenery. After that she probably fainted, and was only brought to consciousness by the shock of a violent fall in which her companion was undermost. Then she heard a voice calling out—

"This way, sir; this way."

She recollected seeing a fireman standing in a narrow passage waving a lantern. By the time that she reached the open air she was quite conscious.

"Let me walk," she said, "I am all right. Where is Agnes?"

"They are behind," answered Tyars. "She is all right. She has two men to look after her. You have only me."

"Wait for them," said the girl. "I will not go home without them."

"All right; we shall wait outside. Let us get out first."

They were standing in a small room, probably the office of the theatre, and a policeman stationed near the window, of which the framework had been broken away, called to them impatiently.

The window was about four feet from the

ground, and Helen wondered momentarily why Claud Tyars accomplished the drop so clumsily. In the narrow street he turned to a police inspector, and pointed to the window.

"Lift the lady down," he said.

A cab was near at hand, and in it they waited —seated side by side in silence—for what seemed hours. The crowd dropped away, seeking some more interesting spot. At last there was a movement at the window, and Tyars got out of the cab and went away, leaving Helen in an agony of mute suspense. In a few moments it was over and the girl breathed freely.

It seemed strangely unreal and dream-like to hear Agnes Winter's voice again; to see her standing on the pavement beneath the yellow gas-lamp, drawing together the gay little opera-cloak round her shoulders.

As Miss Winter stepped into the cab she leant forward and kissed Helen. That was all; no word was said. But the two women sat hand-in-hand during the drive home.

Tyars and Oswin spoke together a few words in a lowered tone quite overwhelmed by the rattle of the cab, and then sat silently. The light of occasional lamps flashed in through the unwashed window, and

showed that the men's clothes were covered with dirt and dust, which neither attempted to brush off.

When the cab stopped in Brook Street, Oswin got out first, and going up the steps opened the front door noiselessly with a latch-key. Tyars paid the cabman, and followed the ladies into the house.

The gas in the hall and dining-room had been lowered, and they all stood for a moment in the gloom round the daintily-dressed table. When Oswin Grace turned up the gas they looked at each other curiously.

The two men bore greater evidence to the terrible ordeal through which they had passed than the ladies. Oswin's coat-sleeve was nearly torn off, while his waistcoat hung open, all the buttons having been wrenched away. Upon his shirt-front there were deep red drops of blood slowly congealing, and the marks of dirty fingers right across the rumpled linen. His face was deeply scratched, and the blood had trickled down into his trim dark beard, unheeded, unquenched.

As to clothing, Claud Tyars was very much in the same condition, but there was a peculiarity worth noting in the expression of his face as he looked round with a half-suppressed smile. All the lines of care were smoothed away from it. In his eyes there

dwelt a clear glow of excitement (the deep inward excitement of a man accustomed to the exercise of an iron control over his own feelings), which had taken the place of a certain concentrated frown of pre-occupation, as if something were going wrong.

There was something characteristic of their calling in the manner in which both men ignored completely the dilapidated condition of their apparel. That alone would have told a keen observer that they were sailors—men accustomed to foul weather and heavy damage—accustomed to accepting things as they come with a placid hope of fairer weather ahead when repairs might be effected.

Miss Winter kept her opera-cloak closed, simply stating that her dress was torn. Her hair was becomingly untidy, but she showed no sign of scratch or hurt.

Helen was hardly ruffled, beyond a few little stray curls, almost golden in colour, stealing down beside her ears. Her dress, however, was a little torn at one shoulder, and a tiny scratch was visible upon the white arm exposed to view. She doubtless owed her immunity from harm, and in all human probability the safety of her life, to the enormous bodily strength of Claud Tyars.

It was she who spoke first.

"Your arm!" she said, pointing to Tyars' right sleeve. "Have you hurt it?"

He looked down at the limb, which was hanging in a peculiar way very close to his body, with a vague and questioning smile, as if it were not his property.

"Yes," he said, "it is broken."

Miss Winter and Oswin went to his side at once. Helen alone remained standing at the table. She said no word, but continued looking at him with very bright eyes, her lips slightly parted, breathing deeply.

He avoided meeting her glance in the same awkward, embarrassed way which she had noticed before; answering the questions put to him with a reassuring smile.

"It happened," he said, "during the first rush. We fell down somewhere through some scenery, and my arm came underneath."

"You put it underneath," corrected Helen, almost coldly, "to . . . save me, I suppose."

Her first feeling was unaccountably akin to anger.

"Instinct," he exclaimed, tersely.

"Shall I fetch a doctor, or will you come with me?" asked the practical Oswin, gently forcing his

friend into a chair. "We are surrounded by them in Brook Street."

"I will go with you," answered Tyars. "But first, I think, we had better see that the ladies have some wine."

With his left hand he reached a decanter, but Miss Winter took it from him.

"You must have some," she said, pouring it out.

"No, thanks," he replied; "I think not, on account of inflammation."

"He is better without it," added Oswin.

Miss Winter gave a little short laugh, very suggestive of annoyance.

"You men are so terribly practical. I should like to sympathize with Mr. Tyars, to minister to him, and take up a picturesque attitude, but you give me no chance," she said, with a bantering air which was half serious.

"An arm broken below the elbow is not so very serious," explained Tyars.

"Claud," added Oswin Grace, "is one of those great strong healthy people who heal like horses."

Nevertheless he kept close to his large friend, and glanced at times into the colourless face with those keen experienced gray eyes of his.

BAYERISCHE STAATS- BIBLIOTHEK

It was, as Tyars had said, nothing very serious—a simple fracture below the elbow and well above the wrist—but the consequences of it might be serious. Claud Tyars was not thinking of the numb, aching pain which had now spread right up his arm. It was only natural that the first thought should be for the great absorbing scheme which was filling his mind. In little more than two months he was to sail from London. In nine weeks he was to lead a picked body of men forth on an expedition of which the peril was patent to them all. He could not afford to devote his few remaining days of preparation to his own health, to the mere recovery from the effects of an accident. There were a thousand details still to be cared for—details which none other but himself could grasp or cope with. For it is the man who reduces detail to a minimum in his own daily existence, and sees personally to that minimum, who finds time to do great things in life. If we hand details over to others—if we wish to be waited on hand and foot in order to find leisure for the larger items of the conglomerate detail called a career, we shall probably employ all our time in endeavouring to teach others to divine our wants.

There are men in the world who pack their own bags, and others who make the task over to some

one else. Claud Tyars was of the former; he habitually did his own packing.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MIDNIGHT CALL.

REFUSING all offers of hospitality made by Oswin and his sister, Claud Tyars went off with his friend to the doctor's, leaving the ladies comfortably installed in arm-chairs by the fire.

They protested that they could not possibly sleep, and that, as it was only twelve o'clock, they would await Oswin's return.

You will say, perhaps, that they were all a trifle too self-possessed and calm to be quite natural. Critical readers will be inclined to give judgment against the poor narrator of these events, accusing him of mismanagement. But there is a certain merit in truthfulness. If any of these ladies had fainted, and clung wildly to their rescuers with bewildering abandonment, it should have been recorded. If Helen Grace had whispered neatly-turned phrases expressive of gratitude to the hungering ears of Claud Tyars, those words should have been set down here. But none of these things happened.

What really took place is narrated above; and it is not the fault of the writer if these persons chose to lose a series of dramatic points, to ignore a number of thrilling situations, and to refrain from anything approaching heroics.

The truth of the matter is, that ladies and gentlemen of this latter end of the nineteenth century are difficult subjects to write about. They will not, like folks upon the stage, make facial contortions capable of record as showing inward emotions. They will not laugh fiendish laughs, nor sigh "heigho!" nor tear their hair, nor beat their bosoms as people did fifty years ago, if one may judge from fictional literature. They are so persistently self-possessed that one cannot wring a dramatic situation out of them anyhow.

We live so quickly nowadays, pass through so many emotions in the day, that our feelings are apt to lose their individuality. When a man can attend a christening in Westminster Abbey, a wedding in Bristol Cathedral, a funeral at Exeter, and finally partake of a regimental dinner at Plymouth, in the same day, one must hardly blame him for failing to be deeply moved by any one of the ceremonies mentioned.

Claud Tyars actually said "Good-night," as he

preceded Oswin Grace out of the room. Such an exit was utterly false to dramatic art, utterly clumsy and ignorant. Now what can one do with such a man as this? He did not even limp in order to show that his arm was injured, as has been done upon the English stage, but walked out of the room without looking back.

And the two ladies left there sat, each in her deep arm-chair, toasting her neatly-shod toes on the fender, and said never a word. They both stared into the fire with such a marked persistence, that one might almost have suspected them of fearing to meet each other's glance.

At last Helen moved. She had evidently just become aware of a black mark on the soft mauve material of her dress. With her gloved hand she attempted to brush it off, and as this had no effect began rubbing it with a tiny handkerchief. Then she raised her eyes. Miss Winter was watching her with a curious smile—a smile much more suggestive of pain than of pleasure.

Their eyes met, and for some moments both seemed on the verge of saying something, which was never said. Then suddenly Helen leant forward and covered her face with her two hands.

Have you ever seen a woman weep from whose

eyes tears have never flowed since childhood? Have you ever seen eyes kindling with a strange surprise through tears, as if they could not understand what was blinding and burning them? It is often hard to realize sorrow, and it is always hard to accept it as one's own property. With some the power of assimilating sorrow is merely a matter of tears, with others it is a dryer process. The habit of shedding tears brings a familiarity which deprives them of their bitterness. Most people, however, and especially in this generation, weep but once or twice in their whole lives. The majority, thank God! only once. Again, the most of us do it in solitude, so that others are spared the sight. It seemed to come to Helen Grace without premonition as a harsh surprise—just as death will come to some of us. She had no time to fly to her own room—no chance of exercising over herself that command which she had learnt from living with men alone.

It is just possible that Miss Winter was not without experience in these same tears. One can never be quite sure of these very cheery women whom one meets everywhere. She made no attempts at consolation. She did not look towards her friend, and there was no outward sign even of sympathy, except that her eyes glistened in a peculiar way. She

merely waited, and, moreover, she had not long to do so. Helen recovered herself as suddenly as she had given way, and rising from her chair, stood with her shoulder turned towards her friend, her two hands upon the mantel-piece, looking down into the fire. Her attitude, moral and physical, was reflective.

"I wonder," she said, "if every one got out of the theatre?"

"Mr. Easton promised to come and tell us," answered Miss Winter.

"To-night?"

"Yes."

The girl raised her head and looked critically at her own reflection in the old-fashioned mirror above the fire-place. The trace of tears had almost vanished from her young eyes—it is only older countenances that bear the marks for long.

Before she moved again the sound of cab-wheels made itself audible in the street, and the vehicle was heard to stop at the door.

Miss Winter rose and went to let in the newcomer.

It was Matthew Mark Easton. He followed Miss Winter into the dining-room, walking lightly—an unnecessary precaution, for his step was like that of a child.

"I do not know," he was saying, "the etiquette observed in England on these points, but I could not resist coming along to see if you had arrived safely."

"Yes—thanks," replied Helen, to whom the latter part of the remark was addressed.

"No one hurt, I trust?" continued he.

"Yes," answered the girl gently; "Mr. Tyars is hurt—his arm is broken."

Easton's mobile lips closed together with a snap, betraying the fact that he had allowed himself the luxury of an expletive in his reprehensible American way. He turned aside, and walked backwards and forwards for a few minutes, like a man made restless by the receipt of very bad news. He glanced at the face of each lady in turn, and concluded that Helen was more sympathetic than Miss Winter in this matter. In a moment he conceived the idea that Agnes Winter was by no means grieved that Tyars should have met with an accident.

He had never considered her a scheming woman, but his conception of her character was that she possessed very decided opinions of her own, and was quite capable of acting up to them against the strongest opposition. For some reason, then, she was decidedly opposed to the expedition about to be undertaken by Tyars and Oswin. He had always

suspected opposition in that quarter, but it had hitherto been passive, as feminine opposition is often compelled to be. This deliberate refusal, however, to simulate a sympathy she did not feel was something more than passive in its tenor.

"Not a compound fracture, I hope?" he said tersely, while turning these things over in his mind.

"He thinks not," answered Helen, reseating herself.

"Was he in pain?"

"I do not know," replied the girl, in a toneless, mechanical way, which brought the quick, monkey-like eyes down upon her like lightning.

It was the matter of a second only. Like a serpent's fang the man's keen eyes flashed towards her and away again. The peculiarly nervous face instantly assumed an expression as near stolidity as could be compassed by features each and all laden with an exceptional intelligence. Then he turned away, and took up a broken fan lying on the supper-table, opening it tenderly and critically.

But Miss Winter was as quick as he. She knew then that he had guessed. Whatever he might have suspected before, she had no doubt now that Matthew Mark Easton *knew* that Helen loved Claud Tyars.

"The worst of it," he broke out, with sudden airiness, "is that there was no fire at all. It was extinguished on the stage. The performance might have been continued."

"It only makes it more horrible," said Miss Winter; "for I suppose there—were some killed?"

"That is so," he answered. "They took forty-two corpses out of our box alone."

"I did not know," said Helen, after a painful pause, "that it was so bad as that."

Easton looked at her with his quaint little wistful smile.

"Yes," he said, with transatlantic deliberation, "it was very bad. We were fortunate. The Almighty has something else for us to do yet, I surmise."

"We ought to be very thankful," said the girl, simply.

"Ya—as; and no doubt we are. I am."

He gravely pulled down his waistcoat, and stood with his legs apart, looking down at his own diminutive boots.

The ladies noticed that he bore no signs of his recent experience. He had doubtless called in at his club to wash and tidy himself before appearing at Brook Street. His left hand was neatly bandaged with white linen.

"Grace," he inquired, "is not hurt, I hope?"

"No, I think not. His hands were scratched—like yours," answered Miss Winter.

"It comes," explained Easton, looking tenderly at his injured knuckles, "from hitting in the dark. I came in contact with some very hard things—possibly British skulls."

Helen laughed—rather too eagerly; but Miss Winter was grave. Presently Oswin Grace came in, opening the front door with his latch-key. He was greeted by an interrogatory "Well?" from Miss Winter.

"He is all right," he answered. "It was a simple fracture. Old Barker set it very nicely, and I sent him off to his club in a cab."

"Then," said Easton, holding out his hand to say good-bye, "I shall go and help him into bed—tuck him in, and sing a soft lullaby over his pillow. Good-night, Miss Winter. Good-night, Miss Grace."

Miss Winter slept at Brook Street that night, according to previous arrangement. She was soon left alone in her bed-room. Helen complained of sleepiness, and, contrary to her custom, did not return to brush her hair before her friend's fire—a mysterious operation, entailing the loss of an hour's sleep, and accompanied by considerable conversation.

The elder lady did not appear to be suffering

from drowsiness. Indeed, she was very wide awake. She threw herself upon the bed, all dressed, in a ridiculously girlish pose, and lay there thinking.

"If it had been any other man," she meditated aloud, "I should have said that he could not possibly go now; but with him one cannot tell. The arm would hardly stop him, though something—else—might. Poor Claud Tyars! the *naïveté* with which he displayed a perfect indifference as to *my* life was very full of meaning."

CHAPTER IX.

ONE morning, about a fortnight later, Matthew Mark Easton received a letter which caused him to leave his breakfast untasted and drive off in the first hansom-cab he could find to Tyars' club.

The waiter whose duty it was to look after the few resident members, informed the American, whom he knew well by sight, that Mr. Tyars was not downstairs yet.

"Well," replied Easton, "I guess I'll wait for him; in fact I am going to have breakfast with him—a boiled egg and two pieces of thin toast."

He was shown into the room occupied by Tyars, and proceeded to make himself exceedingly comfortable, in a large arm-chair, with the morning newspaper.

Tyars was not long in making his appearance—trim, upright, strong as usual, and conveying that unassertive sense of readiness for all emergencies which was at times almost aggressive. He carried his hand

in the smallest and most unobtrusive sling allowed by the faculty. At his heels walked Muggins—the grave, the pink-eyed. Muggins was far too gentlemanly a dog to betray by sign or sound that he considered this visitor's behaviour a trifle too familiar.

"Good morning—captain," said Easton, cheerily. "Well, Muggins—I trust I see you in the enjoyment of health."

The violent chuck under the chin with which this hope was emphasized, received scant acknowledgment from a very stumpy tail. The truth was that Matthew Mark Easton was no great favourite with Muggins. He was not his sort. Muggins had never been a frivolous dog, and now that puppyhood was past, he affected a solemnity of demeanour worthy of his position in life. He looked upon the American as a man lacking self-respect.

"I have news," said Easton at once, laying aside the newspaper; "news from old Smith—Pavloski Smith."

"Where from?" inquired Tyars, without enthusiasm.

"From Tomsk! It is most extraordinary how these fellows manage to elude the police. Here is old Pavloski—an escaped Siberian exile—a man they would give their boots to lay their hands on—goes

back to Russia, smuggles himself across the German frontier, shows that solemn face of his unblushingly in Petersburg, and finally posts off to Tomsk with a lot of contraband luggage as a merchant. I thought I had a fair allowance of cheek, but these political fellows are far ahead of me. Their cheek and their calm assurance are simply unbounded!"

"The worst of it," said Tyars, turning over his letters with small interest, "is that the end is always the same. They all overdo it sooner or later."

"Yes," admitted the American, whose sensitive face betrayed a passing discomfort; "but it is no good thinking of that now."

"Not a bit," acquiesced Tyars, cheerfully. "Only I shall be rather surprised if I meet those three men up there. It would be better luck than one could reasonably expect."

"If one of them gets through with his party, all concerned should be very well pleased with themselves," said Easton. "Now listen to what Pavloski says."

He unfolded a letter, which was apparently a commercial communication written on the ordinary mail paper of a merchant, and bearing the printed address of an office in Cronstadt.

On the first page was a terse advice, written in

a delicate clerkly hand, of the receipt by Hull steamer of a certain number of casks containing American apples.

"This," said Easton, "is from our stout friend. He has received the block soups, and the Winchester cartridges."

He then opened the letter farther, and on the two inside pages displayed a closely written communication in a peculiar pink-tinted ink, which had evidently been brought to light by some process, for the paper was wrinkled and blistered.

"'I have,'" read the American, slowly, as if deciphering with difficulty, "'reached Tomsk without mishap, travelling with an ordinary civilian post-pass, which is very little slower at this time of year, as there are plenty of horses. I have bought a strong sledge, wholly covered in—the usual sledge of a merchant of fine goods—and instead of sleeping in the stations, usually lie down on the top of my cases under the cover. I give as reason for this the information that I have many valuables—watches, rings, trinkets—and being a young merchant, cannot run the risk of theft to save my own personal comfort. I have travelled day and night, according to the supply of horses, but have always succeeded hitherto in communicating with those who are to

follow me. One man on my list was not in the prison indicated—he is probably dead. I find great improvements. Our organization is more mechanical, and not so hysterical—this I attribute to the diminished number of female workers. All the articles with which your foresight provided me have been useful; but the great motor in Siberia is money. With the funds I have at my disposal I feel as powerful as the Czar. I can buy whom I like, and what I like. My only regret is that the name of C. T. has to be suppressed—that the hundreds of individuals who will benefit by his grand generosity will never know the name of the Englishman who has held out his laden hands to those groaning under the yoke of a barbarous oppression. When we are all dead—when Russia is free, his name will be remembered by some one. The watches will be very useful; I have sold two at a high price; but once beyond Irkutsk, and I will sell or give one to the master of each important station, or to the starosti of each village. By this means those who follow me will know that they are on the right track. They cannot well stop at a station, or halt in a village, without being shown the watch, which will tell them that one of us is in front. I have enough watches to lay a train from Irkutsk to the spot where I as-

semble my party. I met my two companions by appointment at the base of the Ivan Veliki tower in the Kremlin, and we spent half an hour in the cathedral together within a musket-shot of the Czar, and under the very nose of the cream of his police. Since then we have not met, but are each working forward by the prescribed route alone. I see great changes here—Russia is awakening—she is rubbing her eyes. God keep you all three!'"

Matthew Mark Easton indicated by a little jerk of the head that the letter was finished. Then after looking at it curiously for a moment, he folded it and put it away in his pocket.

"Old Smith," he said, "waxes quite poetic at times."

"Yes," answered Tyars, pouring out his coffee, "but there is a keen business man behind the poetry."

"One," observed Easton in his terse way, "of the sharpest needles in Russia, and quite the sharpest in Siberia at the present moment."

"He will need to be; though I think that the worst of his journey is over. The cream is, as he says, at Moscow. Once beyond Nijni he will find milk, then milk-and-water, and finally beyond Irkutsk the thinnest water. The official intellect in Siberia

is not of a brilliant description. Pavloski can outwit every gendarme or Cossack commandant he meets, and once out of Irkutsk they need not fear the law. They will only have Nature to compete with, and Nature always gives fair play. When they have assembled they will retreat north like an organized army before a rabble, for there are not enough Cossacks and gendarmes in Northern Siberia to form anything like an efficient corps of pursuit. They may follow, but I shall have the fugitives on board and away long before they reach the seaboard."

"How many are there in Yakutsk?"

"Two thousand altogether, soldiers and Cossacks. They have no means of transport and no commissariat corps. By the time that the news travels south to Yakutsk, that there is a body of supposed exiles to the north, our men will have gained such an advantage that pursuit would be absurd."

"It seems," replied Easton, "so very simple, that I wonder no one has tried it before."

At this moment the waiter entered the room with several hot dishes, but the two men went on discussing openly the question mooted. Club-waiters are the nearest approach to a human machine that modern civilization has yet produced.

"Simply because no one has had the money. I

know several whaling captains who would be ready enough to try, provided they were paid! The worst danger was the chance of the three men being captured as soon as they entered Russia. They are now at their posts in Siberia. In May they meet surreptitiously on the southern slope of the Verkoianiska, cross the mountains, and they are safe. The three leaders will then be together, and they will retreat north as arranged, scaring the Yamschicks into obedience, and taking all the post-deer and dogs with them, so that an immediate pursuit will be impossible. I think," added the organizer of this extraordinary plot, "that we shall succeed."

Easton was silent. His boiled egg had arrived, and his keen little face was screwed up into earnest inquiry as he gently broke the shell with a spoon. He was a strange mixture of the trivial and the great, this sharp-witted American; but he was intensely conscious of his own shallowness. He could touch great things, but he could not grasp them; he could give attention to trifles, but he could not allot to them just that modicum of thought which would suffice. In the position which he had occupied during the last two months, namely, the chief superintendent of trifles, he was excellent. But without the directing control of Claud Tyars he

would probably have given all his attention to small things, neglecting or fearing to touch the great. He would have regarded the pence too closely, failing to make sure that the pounds were safe. There was no lack of courage, but a distinct want of power, and this deficiency became singularly apparent in intercourse with Claud Tyars.

We very often meet men in the world who have done one thing; conceived some great thought, or invented one great combination—say a soda-water cork. Upon that one basis they seem to rest for the remainder of their days. He does not manufacture the soda-water cork, he does not even attend to the advertisement of it; but he invented it long years back in the recesses of a youth which can hardly have been brilliant. One is conscious that he is a great man, or that he should be such, and yet there is a wondering desire to know why he does not get up and invent something else—a machine to cut and read magazines, or something equally in demand.

This was to some extent the position of Matthew Mark Easton at the beginning of the year which has been succeeded by four. He had conceived the idea which Claud Tyars and his intrepid colleagues had now quite wrested from his grasp. The initial

conception had so grown and expanded, had gathered in here and shot out there, in such a manner as to render it quite strange in the eyes of its own father.

It was not a pleasant position, but the American faced it pluckily. He was to some extent an imaginative little man—had been an imaginative boy. He had dreamed dreams just as some others have dreamed them. He had nourished and fostered great ambitions—just as you, my good friend, may have done—just as a poor scribbler *may* have done. We confess nothing, mind you! but there may have been a time . . . And now Easton had met a man, made a friend of a man, who calmly showed him that those same dreams were woefully hollow. It is a strange fatuity, that habit of dreaming. At the very threshold of life we ought by rights to recognize what lies before us. At the very earliest school we attend we probably find that a large portion of our companions are infinitely cleverer than ourselves; in the playground, on football or cricket field, we are bound to realize that there are better players than ourselves. And so on, as we reach out into the world. We find better shots, better dancers, better oars, better seats in the saddle; and perhaps better thinkers, better writers, better workers, better wooers.

But—does all this shake that strange, deep-rooted confidence in self? Does it open our eyes to the melancholy fact that we are not only like other people, but inferior to them? Does it, I ask in all gravity, make you and me acknowledge that this life that we are leading now is, humanly speaking, permanent; that it is the only life we shall ever have, and that it is after all rather a sorry business? No. We go on in a futile way, building up grand dreams beneath our gray hairs, vainly looking to that day when we shall be blest, when we shall be celebrated, and recognized as the great men that we are. And yet at times there comes a fleeting glimpse of the reality. Some one passes us in the race, or does something that we should like to have done, and for a moment our hearts are pressed down with the uncomfortable feeling of being left behind.

This was precisely the feeling which had stolen into the cheery heart of Matthew Mark Easton while he opened his egg with that singular attention which has been previously indicated. When I am a ghost, endowed with the power of looking into men's minds, I shall not peer through the grave eyes, but through the smiling. I shall not flit about among those who weep, but among such as will not weep because they are too courageous.

"Of course, old man," said Easton, "you—*we* shall succeed. Pass the salt, please."

Nothing escaped his keen observation. He knew well enough that he could not play a greater part, and yet there had been placed in his frail frame that longing for action felt at one time or other by all men worth their salt. He did not glance enviously at his friend's huge limbs and quick strength of carriage, for he was accustomed to it. He was accustomed to his own incapacity.

It is probable that Claud Tyars knew something of his friend's feelings upon this subject, for he never made reference to his own share of the exploit beyond what was absolutely necessary. Whatever he may have felt, he never exulted openly in the coming dangers by sea and ice. Their conversation was chiefly respecting the progress of the three adventurous Russians headed by Sergius Pavloski, and the probabilities of their failure or success. It was a safe subject; for neither Claud Tyars nor Matthew Mark Easton could have attempted what these men were undertaking.

CHAPTER X.

AN OVERTURE.

THERE are some—indeed many—people who shun the world because they fear it. Not being sure of its admiration they prefer to avoid the risk of earning its contempt. But there are others who withdraw themselves because there exists in their hearts an honest and unobtrusive contempt for the opinion of that generality which is usually called "the world." Of these latter was Claud Tyars, and it must be allowed that his opinion was in no way aggressive or offensive. He despised the generality of his fellow-men, but he was quite unconscious of so doing. He had lived his short life among men of a race singularly unaffected by the blame or praise of the world—the British upper middle-class. In most moral virtues or faults it is merely a question of degree, and it is therefore comprehensible that Claud Tyars should be unaware of the fact that he carried the peculiarity of his contemporaries to an excess.

It was now a well-known topic of the day that

he was fitting up an Arctic expedition, and the society papers had taken good care to make the most of the terrible defence of the stage-box in the Epic Theatre on the historical night of the panic. The majority of his friends knew that his arm had been broken in that struggle for life, and his refusal of all invitations was therefore a matter of small surprise.

It seemed hardly natural for a man of his character to fear a little unsought publicity, but this excuse he invariably put forward when rallied by his friends for unsociability.

Easton knew no more than the rest of the world why Tyars so suddenly withdrew himself from all social intercourse. They had moved in the same circles to a somewhat limited extent, and had never been coupled as men likely to be found together. It was only by degrees, therefore, that he learnt of Tyars' defection from the duties of a man placed in the midst of the most thoroughly sociable community in the world. From Miss Winter, Easton learnt that Tyars had never even called upon her or at Brook Street, to inquire whether any after effects had shown themselves since the memorable evening of the fire.

The relationship between the two men was just one of those understandings which are impossible

between women, and common enough among their husbands, brothers, and sons. A friendship between women is usually comprehensive—it embraces the lives of both from morning till night without reservation. They are friends indoors, in their bed-rooms; at luncheon, at dinner, at dances, and between those functions. If they meet at night they are straightway consumed with a desire to meet in the morning. They want to shop together, to lunch together, and to take each other up-stairs to see their new hats. If they are unmarried they talk about young men and the millinery means of fascinating the same; if they are married they discuss the weaknesses, physical or mental, of their husbands, and the best treatment for same. They do not even stop there, but go on to compare cooks, and even exchange a receipt or two.

Now with men it is different. We have out-door friends and in-door friends. Old March Brown, for instance, is a first-rate fellow, an excellent sportsman, the keenest fisherman that ever wet a wader; but in a ball-room he is no friend of mine—I hate him! We have fished together in Norway and Greenland, but I do not even know his wife's name, nor his cook's besetting sin.

Then there is young Adonis Smiler. He is usually

the best dancer in the room; it is a pleasure to take him out as one's friend. He always gives satisfaction to his hostess, and several freshly-bloomed young ladies invariably think of him the next morning. But because we take each other out to dances, Smiler does not, any more than I, propose spending our autumn holiday together. No; Smiler is a London friend, and nothing else—he is an evening friend. By daylight he is an effeminate dandy, and I should not think of being on the same moor as Smiler were he in the possession of a gun.

A friend of mine came in to see me a few minutes ago, interrupting the flow of these remarkable observations. For five years he has been diametrically under my feet; we have always kept half a world between us, and we have never thought of corresponding. He is an antipodean friend, and we have become quite accustomed to thinking of each other as in the antipodes. In fact, each formed part of the other's antipodes. We took up the same questions that we left unsettled five years ago, and so far as I could gather, the friendship has in no way cooled, though we have never met twice in the same part of the world.

In a word, the friendship of women means the possession of many, if not all, interests in common;

while men can build up the enduring fabric upon the basis of one mutual interest only.

Matthew Mark Easton possessed mental energy of a conceptive order; Claud Tyars was a healthy Hercules, his body longed for work. They were brought together by that vague influence we call Chance, and they found a common interest at once. But their friendship, which lasted as long as human friendships can last, was never general. They never knew much of each other's lives. The great absorbing interest of their existence during these years had never flagged; there had always been some point or another requiring instant discussion, and they never found time to talk of themselves or of each other.

The Americans are the most independent people of the world. They have learnt more thoroughly than any other race the great lesson that whatever may be done for us in the hereafter we must look after ourselves now. They expect no help and they ask none. Easton was a true American in his social proclivities; he was not the man to overstep those tacit boundaries by which men's friendships are confined. So long as things went on satisfactorily, so long as Tyars attended to the outfit of ship and crew, he was free to live where he liked and how he liked.

Oswin Grace was naturally brought into daily communication with Tyars, but they met at the docks, usually on board their vessel, and at evening they parted without question of meeting later. The young officer, accustomed as he was to obedience, had by this time quite fallen under the influence of his chief, and their relationship towards each other was therefore slightly altered.

Miss Winter, however, was a woman of resource. For reasons of her own she determined to bring Claud Tyars out of his shell. It was nothing to her that the exploring vessel should be out of dry-dock and almost ready for sea, her crew engaged, her stores on board. She had one card left, and she played it with that calm assurance which follows on skilful courage. And so it came about that Muggins set up a great barking, and displayed a determination to repel or die, one morning when breakfast had been cleared away by the lightning-fingered club-waiter.

The diminutive buttons attached to the hall-door knocked, entered, and stood aside in three movements, like the soldier's son that he was.

"Admiral Grace—sir," he announced, clippingly.

Then Muggins, obeying one terse word, retired under the arm-chair nearest to the fire.

The admiral entered with some dignity and laid

his stick and hat upon the table; then he turned round and glared at the button-boy, causing the door to be shut precipitately.

"Good morning, sir!" said Tyars, pleasantly. He was standing, but did not offer his hand. He had a singular and almost foreign way of avoiding the practice of shaking hands, and now that his right arm was disabled he never offered his left.

The admiral looked at him, and then held out his hand very deliberately, so that no mistake could be made.

"Good morning," he said; "your hand."

He took the reluctant fingers held out, it must be confessed, rather awkwardly, in a good hearty, old-fashioned grip.

"I came," said the old gentleman so concisely that Tyars almost wondered whether he had asked aloud the question that was in his mind, "to your club because I have something to say to you."

He stopped, visibly embarrassed, in a bluff, undisguised manner; his kindly but firm lips moved as if framing tentative words.

"It is," Tyars hastened to say, "a beastly morning. I hope you have not got wet."

"Thanks, no; I am not afraid of a little clean water." He pulled himself up and looked somewhat

pugnacious. "I came about a matter which—I have something to say which is not easy for an old fellow to say to a young one."

"Oh!" Tyars drew forward a chair in a pleasant and comfortable way—it was, by the way, a remarkably comfortable chair. "Won't you sit down? Put your boots on the fender, your right foot is wet, these roads are so badly kept."

"D—n it, sir," said the admiral, without accepting the chair, "I didn't come here to talk about my boots."

Tyars looked at him in his large placid way—as one sees a huge Newfoundland look at a fox-terrier. He made no further attempt to stave it off, for he knew that it had come. He was a man who hated thanks and apologies, and never learnt to receive them graciously.

And so they stood opposite to each other—two typical Englishmen—an old and a young sailor. Not poetical, nor romantic, nor highly intellectual—you are not asked to imagine that. But—honest! Honest and strong. Surely the Creator meant men to be both these; for if they are, no woman need fear to love them.

"I came," said the old mariner, fixing his solemn gray eyes upon his companion's face, "to ask you to

accept an apology. If I do it badly it is because I have had no practice at that sort of thing."

"Please," interrupted Tyars, gravely, "do not say anything more. There must be some mistake. I know of nothing that could require an apology, and I am like yourself—I know nothing of such matters. Won't you sit down?"

This time the admiral accepted. He sat squarely down, undeterred; he was fully bent upon hammering out what he considered his dutiful apology.

"It is," he said, in a more conversational manner, "like this. When you first came home, and Oswin brought you in to dinner, I took a dislike to you. I —well, I thought you were a humbug—what the Frenchmen call a *poseur*. Perhaps I was a bit jealous about that merchantman you brought home—I would rather have had my boy commanding her, and you playing second fiddle. Then there is another thing. I am afraid I am a little jealous of all young fellows who come to my house and cut an old fogey out; you understand? My girl—my little girl, Helen."

"Yes," answered Tyars, slowly, "I understand."

"I think a lot of her," said the old fellow, with an apologetic laugh, "and I am always imagining that every man who sees her is going to fall in love with her. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" echoed Tyars, with sudden gaiety.

"Stupid of me," added the admiral, "but I can't help it, you know!"

"Ha! ha!" repeated Claud Tyars, in identical tones.

"Well," continued Admiral Grace, settling himself more comfortably in the large chair, "it all comes to this. I have found out my mistake all round, and I wanted to tell you that I consider you are a gentleman and a sailor, and I am proud to know you."

He pulled out his cuffs, and emitted a long breath of relief. Like a great schoolboy, he had gravely made up his mind to say this thing, and now that it was over he was fairly well pleased with the manner in which he had managed to say it.

"It is very good of you to say so," replied Tyars, rather lamely, for he was a poor hand at turning glib phrases. "By your own showing, however, no apology was necessary. It was only a matter of thoughts, and we are all free to think what we like."

"Then," said the old gentleman with a chuckle, "I did not show my dislike?"

"Not that I noticed," replied Tyars. He wisely refrained from adding that this might be because he had never taken the trouble to look.

"That's all right. And now, my boy, I want to thank you for your bravery and coolness the other night. From what I hear, you undoubtedly saved my little girl's life—if not the lives of the whole party. It quite turned the tables on me. It was quite contrary to what I was thinking of you, you see. That broken arm too—I hope you did it saving Helen."

"I did," answered the young fellow, with a quick, unnatural laugh; "but why do you hope that?"

"Because," replied Admiral Grace, gravely, "it must be much more satisfactory to an English sailor to think that he carried away a spar in saving another life than his own—the life of a woman and a pretty girl too. Helen wants to thank you herself, which she somehow forgot to do. Will you come and dine one night, and give her a chance? Name your own night."

Claud Tyars did not seem to hesitate. He bowed gravely, while his beard and moustache moved as if he were biting his lip in order to control some passing emotion.

"Thank you," he said, "very much; but I am afraid I must refuse. I am so busy that I have entirely given up going out."

"As you like," snapped the admiral, after a little

pause. He was vexed, and did not care to disguise it. He naturally concluded that Tyars bore him ill-feeling despite the apology which had been so difficult for him to make. It was no hard matter to divine this from the proud old man's sudden hauteur of manner; and Claud Tyars doubtless saw it, for his unobtrusive gaze had never left his companion's face. It was rather strange that he did not hasten to undeceive his visitor, to protest that nothing could have given him greater pleasure than to dine at Brook Street. He might easily have put forward another excuse. It was a matter requiring very little to smooth it, but the young Englishman deliberately left it as it was—left his refusal in all its curt formality for the old martinet to put in his pipe and smoke at leisure.

He stood where he had stood during the entire interview, with his one able hand resting on the back of a chair. His attitude and expression were distinctly courteous, and—nothing more. It is, one finds, these grave men who are so difficult to read. One may hide many things, many sorrows and loves and hatreds behind a ready smile; but a pleasant, dense gravity is much more impenetrable.

Admiral Grace rose, gave one quick glance at his companion's face, and then took up his hat and stick.

"I am due at the Admiralty," he said. "Good morning."

Tyars followed him towards the door, gravely respectful. He opened the door and followed him down the thickly-carpeted stairs. Half-way the old man stopped.

"By the way," he said, raising his stick, "Miss Winter asked me to deliver a message. She has found a berth for a *protégé* of yours, the son of your carpenter. She will be in at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning if you can find time to call and see her about it."

"Thank you. I will try to do so."

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

And the old fellow stumped out into the sunny street. A woman would have taken his last words as a confession that he had been sent by Miss Winter—some men might have read it so, but Claud Tyars was not of these.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

THE next morning he despatched his laborious correspondence as quickly as a cramped left hand would allow. He was not dressed in the tar-stained old suit donned for dock-work, but in blue serge.

Armed with a cigar to keep out the morning coolness, he set off westward at a swinging pace, and deliberately walked into the trap set for him by Miss Winter. This was so simple, and it succeeded so smoothly, that the lady whose well-intentioned deceit it was stood almost breathless in her own bedroom, pressing her hand to her breast and wondering whether she should laugh or cry.

The maid answering his summons swung the door so wide open as to leave no doubt of his welcome and expectation. Miss Winter was in, would he step up-stairs? This he did with rather less agility than when he had possessed two arms to swing. He was shown into the drawing-room, and for a moment imagined himself alone. Then he

was conscious of a sound of smooth dress material, and a young lady rose from the music-stool, partially concealed by the piano placed cornerwise near the window. It was a gloomy morning, and the lady stood with her back towards the light, and her face consequently in the shadow. But Tyars saw at once that this was not Agnes Winter; indeed the sight (as pleasant a one as any man could wish to look upon) brought a quick contraction of pain to eyes and lips. He knew only too well every sweet curve and outline of head and form placed in graceful silhouette against the lace curtains.

They knew that they had been both tricked, and the sudden knowledge of it seemed to sweep all social formula away, for they never greeted each other. Something in the girl's attitude (for he could not see her glowing eyes) told the man then that he had not this thing to bear alone. His sorrow was hers; that which weighed upon his broad back almost crushed her slight young shoulders beneath its weight. This great heavenly light, this opaque darkness, had crept into her heart as into his, against the defence of a stubborn will. It was so new to both, so utterly surprising, so completely unlooked for, that both alike were dazed. Since its advent, both had walked on with uncertain steps, staggering

vaguely beneath a new and wholly bewildering responsibility; something that seemed to have no beginning and no end on earth; something that tugged at the heart and cast a great veil of indifference over all pleasures and all trivial occupations; something that brings our every-day life suddenly forward like a cunning stage-light cast from the wings, and builds up behind the daily round of toil and pleasure a vague shimmering perspective of which yon dimmest distance is Heaven—and nothing else.

When a strong man gets a fever, the doctor shakes his head: when a strong heart has this pain it is pain indeed.

At last the girl moved. She came towards him, only a few paces, and then stopped. She had emerged from the shadow, and the whiteness of her face struck him like a blow.

"Agnes," she said, steadily, "has just gone upstairs."

He nodded his head in a sharp, comprehensive way which had been acquired at sea.

"I did not expect to find you here," was his reply, less inconsequent than might at first appear.

She crossed the room, passing close by him, so that a breath of cool air reached him, and went towards the mantel-piece. Her intention was evidently

to ring the bell, but her strength of purpose seemed to fail her at the moment, and she stood undecided upon the white fur hearth-rug with her back turned towards him.

"Had you known—?" she began.

"I think," he completed, "that I should not have come."

Her eyelids quivered for a second, and the faintest suggestion of a very sad smile flickered across her lips. He did not know that he was making matters worse, making her burden doubly heavy. He did not know that this very strength of his was what she loved. He was very far from suspecting that she had foreseen his answer before she asked the strange question. He would have been intensely surprised to learn that, although her back was turned towards him, she saw his attitude, the quiescent strength of each limb (denoting subtly the inner strength of the soul) as he stood upright, patient, and gentle, tearing out his iron heart and trampling it underfoot. He never saw the shadowy little smile, nor knew its pathetic meaning.

And so he kept his secret, he held his peace despite a gnawing temptation to speak. He allowed her to continue thinking, if so indeed she thought, that he was sacrificing her to his own ambition, as

Miss Winter honestly believed. He never told her that he was compelled to carry out his perilous scheme because he was bound in honour. It was high-flown, unpractical, Quixotic, if you wish. But —that same old Don. Was he a buffoon or a hero? Forsooth, some of us hardly know. This world of ours would be a sorry place were we all practical, and did we all fly low. And I venture to think that this man with whom we deal was no exception— there are others like him. That he is no creature of the imagination, but an honest nineteenth-century Englishman, who paid the income-tax, and sometimes wore a silk hat, can easily be ascertained, for these events are but five years old, and there are men in many London club-rooms to-day who will tell you of Claud Tyars. It is just because he is of our own time that I have attempted to string together this record in the hope that some may read it and gather from the study a little pride in that they claim with such as he a joint nationality and a co-inheritance of those strong plain virtues which made, in days gone by, a great nation out of a little island.

That singular sense of familiarity seemed to have come to them again, as it had come once before. There was no explanation, and they yet understood

each other well enough. It seemed as if they had known each other all their lives, almost as if they had met in some other life. She turned and looked across the room at him with drawn and weary eyes in which there was yet a smile as if to tell him that she was strong, that he need not fear for her. And he met her gaze with that self-suppressing gravity. He had set bounds for himself, and beyond these he would not step an inch, not even for her. He would not tell her that he loved her because, if you please, he considered it wrong to do so under the circumstances. Here was a man who not only had principles, but actually acted up to them instead of seeking to make others do so. For we all have principles applicable to the conduct of our neighbours.

"Can you tell me," he said at length, "whether this is accidental or intentional?"

"This meeting?"

"Yes."

She shook her head.

"I cannot say," she answered, loyal to her friend. She knew that if it was intentional, Agnes Winter was not the woman to do such a thing wantonly.

He answered his own question.

"It must," he said, judicially, "have been in-

tended. Of course with every good motive—but it was a little cruel."

"She did not know," pleaded the girl. "She did not understand. Perhaps we are not quite the same as other people."

"You are not," he answered, slowly; "there is no one like you."

It is probable that such words had been spoken to her before, for there are men—slimy parasites—who seek to raise themselves in the esteem of others by fulsome flattery, and if she had passed through a few London seasons without meeting some samples, she must have been singularly lucky. But the words were spoken so simply and with so much straightforward honesty that the veriest prude could not have taken offence. Moreover, this girl had apparently no thought of such a thing.

She glanced at him, and then her gaze fell on nothing more interesting than a somewhat ancient carpet. This was more or less appropriate, for in her dear gray eyes there was ancient history—the most ancient of all—older than any Egyptian record. Dreams! Nothing but dreams of what might have been if . . . Ah, that little word! there is no crueller in the dictionary. If, my brethren, life were not what it most assuredly is, we might be happy. If

human beings were only not human, there might be bliss here below. If, moreover, I who write these poor lines were only a gifted novelist, I might know how to patch things up. I might do away, not only with the few yards of carpet that lay between them, but with the larger, tougher circumstances that held them apart. I might work up a series of marvellous and wholly impossible events, draw most heavily upon the reserve of your credulity, and close with the astounding untruth that these two were happy ever after. But I am a modest man. I am shy of taking upon myself the task of improving the Creator's work, of offering suggestions to the Almighty. We may rest assured that He has done the best for us possible under the circumstances. This is no work of imagination; it is merely a somewhat lame statement of facts, and if these facts are to be subverted for the edification of readers, it would be hard to know where to make the commencement.

Before either of these two persons had spoken again, their opportunity of ever doing so was taken from them, for Miss Winter was heard approaching, singing as she came. She opened the door noisily, and came into the room, rather too slowly, considering the emphasis with which the handle had been turned.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, without surprise, "you have come. It is very good of you, for Oswin tells me you are very busy."

She looked at him very keenly, but never glanced in the direction of Helen, who was arranging some untidy music on the top of the piano.

"Yes," he answered, rather vaguely, "I have a good deal to do."

"It is," she hastened to say, in her most practical way, "about Tim—what is his name?"

"Peters?" suggested he.

"Peters—yes. You never forget anything."

"I do not forget very much," he admitted, in the same perfunctory way, but he looked over her head towards Helen, which made the quick-witted little woman of the world think that perhaps the remark was not intended for her information alone.

"A friend of mine," she continued, "a Mr. Mason, wants a boy on board his yacht, and I thought that Peters would do, if you are not taking him with you."

"No," quietly, "I am not taking him with me."

"Then I may send young Peters to see Mr. Mason?"

"Certainly. I am much obliged to you for troubling."

He was at his stiffest, and Miss Winter could not help admiring the innate good-breeding with which he attempted to seem pleasant and conversational. She had seen from the threshold that her plot had failed, and it was just one of those plots which cannot afford to fail. Success would have made her a benefactor to both, but success had not come to her, and she recognized instantly the falseness of her position. She knew this man well enough to foresee that he would never forgive her; for, as he himself had said, he was not of those who forget. She knew that this little plot, which had been hatched in a minute, and executed in ten, would alter the friendship between herself and this man during the rest of their lives. And she had always liked him; from the first she had been drawn towards him insensibly. There was something in his strong, self-contained nature that appealed to her cheery womanhood, and now she felt his anger as she had never felt the wrath of any one since her girlhood. Perhaps this feeling unnerved her. It is just possible that something might have been said or done just then which would have altered everything. There are moments when our lives hang on a balance, and in such times we cannot do better than did Claud Tyars; we cannot do better than throw boldly in the weight of

duty, which is the truest weight and measure placed in our mortal hands.

Agnes Winter was fully aware that between herself and Claud Tyars no explanation would take place. He was not the sort of man to listen to or offer explanations. She knew that he would never speak of this incident, and felt that her own courage would fail her to broach the subject.

There was nothing for it but to let him go. She had been actuated by the best motives. It was not her own happiness, but that of her dearest friend for which she had schemed. She had played a bold game, and now her hand—the losing hand—lay exposed. There was nothing to do but to accept defeat. She did it as pluckily as she could, shaking hands and smiling into his grave face as he left the room.

When he was gone the two women returned to their separate occupations. Helen opened a music-book, and arranged it upon the stand, as a preliminary to seating herself at the piano.

Miss Winter had some letters to write. She drew a little table towards the fire, and made a certain small fuss in opening inkstand and blotting-book; but she did not commence writing, and somehow or other Helen did not begin to play. She turned the

pages, and seemed uncertain as to the selection of a piece.

At last the elder woman looked up—or, to be more correct, she raised her head, and looked into the bright fire, touching her lips reflectively with the feathers of a quill pen.

"He looks worn and tired," she said.

"Yes," answered the girl, softly, and in that little word there was a whole world—a woman's world, which is a much larger thing than our world. Ours is a place wherein to work until we are tired, and then to rest until we are ready to work again. It is a place wherein a few pleasures are scattered here and there among the tasks, and some of us seem to meet with but one or two of them, while we come across a great deal of heavy labour. But women—the women at least of whom some of us cannot help writing—have little actual work set them to do. The best of them, moreover, find that pleasure fails to fill up all their time, and so they dream. They make tasks for themselves, and love to execute them carefully, for these are the labours of love. And in their leisure moments they sit down and make for themselves this larger world, which is beyond our comprehension, because our minds are necessarily full of the hard, hammer-headed facts of daily life

—daily competition, and the daily struggle to wrest a livelihood out of our neighbours' pockets.

Some men there are, however, fortunate enough to form a part—perhaps the greatest part—of this unseen world to some woman; and it really matters very little that she clothe him in a wondrous individuality of her own creation. If he is true to her, and honestly endeavours to do his best by her, a higher Hand than his will see that the veil be not torn too ruthlessly from her eyes.

"All this to-do," you will say, "about a little word!" All this to-do, if you please, and infinitely more, for it was all contained in the small word spoken by this girl. It claimed possession, and even pretended to a monopoly, as if this anxiety were hers, and she were jealous of its possession; as if this man's weal or woe, his incomings, his outgoings, his words and his deeds, were hers—hers alone to sigh over, to weep, to rejoice, to despair over. And just because it was her property, she refused to discuss it, even as you and I have probably one person in the world whose virtues or faults we utterly refuse to discuss with any living soul.

CHAPTER XII.

EASTON'S CARE.

As the middle of February approached, Claud Tyars was tranquilly engaged in his preparations. Several ladies were pleased to express their disapproval of this affectation of hard work, and failed to see why his evenings should be devoted to a task for which he had plenty of time during the day. But then ladies rarely see the necessity of complete devotion, and never quite understand that love of work or sport which exercises over men an absorbing influence. This is doubtless the reason why woman's schemes grow hoary and effete in their childhood. This is why women are still talking of their rights, and have not yet secured them. There are also, however, many men who are no better in this respect than the weaker sex—men who imagine that the larger deeds of life are done *en passant*. It takes a strong mind to compass absorption, and a stronger to battle successfully against it. In the course of our lives we occasionally meet with a mind

of this description—a mind that can shake itself free at times from the absorbing pursuit, and take quite a natural interest in the smaller environments of existence. But such men are rare; and as the world goes on, gathering detail day by day, they bid fair to become extinct. It simply comes to this, that there is no time to master the entirety of more than one subject, be it work or be it play; and if we attempt to handle matters of which we are only partially masters, some one else with fuller knowledge will come and supersede us, holding us up to ridicule and contempt.

Claud Tyars did not possess one of the rare intellects cited above. I do not claim that for him. He was no genius—no *rara avis*—but merely a purposeful, somewhat stubborn Englishman, such as one may meet on any club stairs in London, at most hours of the day or night. The only remarkable thing about him was the possession of a singular memory; but as that, individually, had no direct influence upon his life, it has not been made much of in this record. The memory, as it happens, does not stand alone like some other gifts, such as music, or drawing, or a voice. It has not the power to make a man, of its own individual strength, like one of these; and yet if it be given in conjunction with

some slight talent, it will raise that talent and its possessor almost to the level of genius.

It would be hard to determine how far Tyars realized his position. He was a disciplinarian of the firmest mould, and it is probable that he had never, up to this time, allowed for a moment the fact that he loved Helen Grace. This determination to cultivate the blindness of those who will not see was not dictated by cowardice; because Claud Tyars was, like most physically powerful men, inclined to exaggerate the practice of facing disagreeable facts with both eyes open. He had refused to realize this most inconvenient truth, because he was oppressed by a vague fear that realization meant betrayal. His attitude was one assumed often enough by many of us. He wished to be in a position to deny.

He was, as I have attempted to show, a fairly determined man, and one anxious to act up to slowly-conceived principles. His attitude towards Helen Grace had been, from a period previous to the fire at the Epic Theatre, a carefully-studied demonstration of indifference. And now all this had crumbled to dust; his lofty barricade had been thrown down at the raising of a woman's hand. From the very first there had been, between himself and Agnes Winter, an antagonism of which the chief

peculiarity was a marked lack of enmity. They were friends, but unquestionably antagonistic.

He now suspected that Miss Winter had known all along that Helen Grace was not the same to him as other women. Added to this was a suspicion that she calmly and deliberately undertook the task of forcing him to say as much to Helen herself. He could think this now without vanity. And there was left to him, as he quitted Miss Winter's house, the startling knowledge that she had succeeded in her purpose. Most men, sooner or later in their lives, find themselves outwitted by a woman. It is usually in some trifling matter, and just one of those trifles which affect greater questions to follow. It was something new for Tyars to find himself in this position. He had, you see, had remarkably little to do with women, which probably accounted for this novelty.

Miss Winter's action puzzled him exceedingly. He was inexperienced, and therefore ignorant of a great motive influencing the thoughts of women all through their lives: namely, the love of Love. This is a motive of which men are singularly ignorant. Has any one ever met a male match-maker? Has any one come across a father who is by turns conveniently blind and inconveniently keen-sighted, as

are nine mothers out of ten? Have you, my friend, ever been assisted in that little affair of yours with —you know who, by Tom or Dick or Harry?

A French cynic (whose name is here suppressed, because his works and his sayings are so very cheap) was of opinion that a woman first loves her lover, and then loves Love. Like those of other nationalities this French cynic occasionally sacrificed truth to smartness. He oftentimes failed to deliver an epigram by endeavouring to be too epigrammatic; and one regrets that he should at times have expressed his thought in such a few words. The old philosopher knew well enough that at the bottom of all feminine passions there is the love of Love itself.

Claud Tyars had never studied women, for the simple reason that he had never had cause to do so. It was therefore a mystery to him why Agnes Winter should have meddled in a matter distinctly personal to himself. His anger against the lady was chiefly aroused by a chivalrous respect for the feelings of Helen Grace; and his dominating thought during the few days following his visit to Miss Winter, was that he was bound in honour to avoid meeting Helen before he sailed. But at times the recollection of that short interview would force its way into his

mind, leaving him irresolute. She knew now, so what difference could it make? He remembered each little incident, each word spoken, and the tiniest inflection of tone in the speaking. Every movement was before his eyes, and he was haunted by the vision of Helen, as she stood near the fire looking back over her shoulder at him, with a smile in those soft, pathetic, old-world eyes of hers. It was a smile that would haunt him ever after; for once his memory was a curse.

It never occurred to him to wonder over the singular lack of surprise in his own mind at his present position. Indeed there was to his simple, straightforward comprehension no cause for astonishment in the fact that he should love Helen Grace; and many a subtler man than this athletic Briton has argued to himself that there is no surprise in love. Most men are convinced that there is no alternative. Discipline is a necessity which the majority of boys are taught to recognize before they learn anything else, and whatever it may be to women, love is a discipline to men. It seems very plain that there is for the majority of us one woman placed in the world within our reach (though many of us have to stretch up or down to meet her), and we must love that woman simply because she is there for the

purpose. We may see her faults and deprecate them—these faults may clash continually with our own, but still we love her and we cannot help it. We simply bow to a necessity without defining it. It seems that all the surprise lies in the other side of the question; namely, in the fact that we are loved. But Claud Tyars was not one of those subtle persons who would distil all the joy out of life by too deep analysis. It never occurred to him to attempt a definition of Helen's feelings towards himself. He had not asked her if she could ever love him, she had told him nothing unasked; and yet it seemed to be all understood between them. It was one of those many things which go *sans dire* among us who have tongues to speak and ears to hear—one of the cases which the heart appropriates and understands with an understanding beyond that of the ears or eyes. They had never spoken much together, these two. They had only met at odd moments in odd, public places; and almost all their words have been set down here. But there was something else which cannot be set down here, which never has been set on paper yet; something which, by the mere presence or absence of a certain person, lends a superhuman interest to trifles or deprives existence of its charm.

These thoughts may have revolved, flitted, chased each other through the mind of this Englishman; but, true to his birth, he never put them into shape: he never attempted definition. There are many things which cannot be defined, and the chiefest of them I take to be a woman's heart. There is the loftiest pride, and close beside it the completest humility; but one can never tell which of the two will be up in arms before the other. With one of them most women meet most difficulties; but as far as I, in a small way, have learnt to know them, no rule can be laid down as to which arm they will take up under any circumstances that may arise.

During the few days that followed his call at Miss Winter's, Tyars avoided meeting Oswin Grace. There was plenty of work to be done, and he did it with extraordinary care, and a marked attention to detail. He heard that the younger Peters had been engaged by the yachtsman, and was to enter upon his new duties the second week in March. The old carpenter was still sore, but more resigned to being parted from his son. From the persistence with which he spoke well of Miss Winter, it appeared probable that this better state of mind had been brought about by her influence.

There was, however, one person from whose

society Tyars found it impossible to withdraw. This person was Matthew Mark Easton; the keenest observer, as it happened, among his friends. Since the receipt of Pavloski's letter the American had appeared to realize suddenly the responsibility he was incurring. There is a period in every scheme, whether it deal in peace or war, when this sudden sense of responsibility is recognized; and this period usually follows on the first action.

At all hours of the day or night Easton kept dropping in, either at the club or on board the exploring vessel. There were a thousand minor points upon which he wished to consult Tyars, a thousand trifling orders executed which had to be reported to the leader.

And he managed very cleverly. Any one with sufficient leisure and astuteness to dog the footsteps and follow out the motives of this keen-witted American during that chill month of February five years ago, would have been edified by a complete study of unobtrusive watchful care. He never quite understood his friend; he never quite arrived at the inner wheels of his mind to see that which was being slowly ground there. But he was conscious of the grinding, and he sometimes wondered what sort of man Claud Tyars would be when he had passed through this phase of his life. Since boyhood Tyars

had always been singular. There had been no turning-points in his life, no acute angles; but there had been one or two great broad curves around which as boy and as man he had pressed with a strong slow impulse, just as some of us have seen huge rivers like the Nile, or the Volga, or the Danube press onward round curve and over sunny plain with a force which comes we know not whence; but we can see that while it is slow and gentle, it means to go on, and there is no resisting it.

Matthew Mark Easton stood and watched, as you may have watched these slow strong rivers, and knew that his friend was passing on to some new country with a purpose which he could not stay nor turn aside. Probably he felt a little doubtful of Claud Tyars—felt that he could not rely upon him to act like other men. At any moment the unexpected might supervene.

Deeply, however, as he felt his responsibility, anxious as he was, he never lost spirit. He was one of those men whose courage rises to the occasion, and while he recognized fully that without Claud Tyars failure was inevitable, he would not blind himself into the belief that the leader was absolutely safe.

This is perhaps the time to justify as far as possible the action of these three men. To begin

with, it must be clearly understood that escape from Siberia by the north is a perfectly feasible thing. That it has been attempted by a party of men quite inadequately prepared, almost without money and entirely dependent on their own resources, is an historical fact. At least it is as historical as any fact connected with the darker side of Russian domestic administration. That the attempt failed is equally well known, but success was almost within the grasp of these desperate fugitives, and only eluded them by the want of such facilities as could easily have been supplied by outside aid. That the attempt to effect such an escape was on another occasion crowned with success, is a fact upon which it is inexpedient to enlarge here. This is, partially at least, a work of fiction, and it would be cowardly and very despicable to endanger the liberty of two brave men by taking advantage of confidence, in order to claim the first telling of their history. In anticipation therefore of comment, and in view of shoulders sceptically shrugged, it is perhaps wise to deny the charge of improbability at once. This scheme of assisting escape from the vast prison-land of Russia by the Arctic Ocean is not an impossible dream conceived by the novelist in order to find a picturesque background for his stage. For surely the life that

throbs and writhes and struggles all around us—the life going on beneath the thousands, nay the millions of smoking chimneys in London, is sufficiently interesting to write about, to read of, and to meditate upon, without inventing impossible human beings and impossible human lives.

In reply therefore to all scepticism as to the possibility of escape from Siberia by the north, there are only four words to say. It has been done!

In reply to arguments on the improbability of two Englishmen and an American taking up this scheme, and spending thereupon their time, their money, and their energies; risking therein their lives, their reputations, and in the case of Oswin Grace a career, it can only be pleaded that it is an easy matter to find half a dozen Englishmen ready at this moment to do the same.

And, speaking generally, as one wanders over the face of the globe, gathering evidence here and there, picking up little odds and ends of stories (the never-failing and always fresh stories of the lives of men), it seems hard to recognize that there is anything which some Englishman or another will not undertake.

CHAPTER XIII.

EASTON TAKES COUNSEL.

At the risk of being accused of betraying the secrets of the sex, this opportunity is taken of recording an observation made respecting men. It is simply this, that we all turn sooner or later to some woman in our difficulties. And when a man has gone irretrievably to the dogs, his descent is explicable by the simple argument that he happened to turn to the wrong woman.

Matthew Mark Easton had hitherto got along fairly well without feminine interference, but this in no manner detracted from his respect for feminine astuteness. This respect now urged him to brush his hat very carefully one afternoon, purchase a new flower for his button-hole, and drive to Miss Winter's.

He found that lady at home and alone.

"I thought," he said, as he entered the room and placed his hat carefully on the piano, "that I should find you at home this afternoon. It is so English outside. Excuse my apparent solicitude for my

hat. It is a new one. Left its predecessor at the Epic."

"The weather does not usually affect my movements," replied Miss Winter. "I am glad you came this afternoon, because I am not often to be found at home at this time."

"Oh!" he answered, coolly, as he accepted the chair she indicated. "I should have gone on coming right along till I found you in."

Easton's way of making remarks of this description sometimes made an answer superfluous, and Miss Winter took it in this light now. She laughed and said nothing, obviously waiting for him to start some new subject.

He sat quietly and looked with perfect self-possession, not at the carpet or the ceiling, as is usual on such occasions, but at her. At last it was borne in upon him that he had not called for this purpose, pleasant as the exercise of it might be; so he spoke.

"Then," he said, conversationally, "you go out mostly in the afternoons?"

"Yes; I am out a great deal. I have calls to make and shops to look at, and I often take tea with Helen."

His little nod seemed to say, "Yes; I know of that friendship."

"And," he continued, with a vast display of the deepest interest, "I surmise that you go in a close carriage, so that the weather does not hinder you."

"No; I only have an open carriage, a Victoria."

"Ah!"

"It is a very convenient vehicle, so easy of access."

"Yes; so I should surmise."

"And it is light for the horse."

"Runs easily?" he inquired, almost eagerly.

"Yes, it runs easily."

Then they seemed to come to a full-stop again. She racked her brain for some subject of sufficient interest and not too far removed from the safe topic of weather.

It was a ludicrous position for two persons of their experience and *savoir-faire*. At last Miss Winter gave way to a sudden impulse without waiting to think to what end the beginning might lead.

"How is Mr. Tyars?" she asked.

"He is well," was the answer, "thank you. His arm is knitting nicely."

There was a little pause, then he added with a marked drawl (an Americanism to which he rarely gave way)—

"Ho—w is Miss Grace?"

Agnes Winter looked up sharply. They had got there already, and her loyalty to friend and sex was up in arms. And yet she had foreseen it surely all along. She had known from the moment of his entering the room that this point was destined to be reached.

Matthew Mark Easton met the gaze of those clever northern eyes with a half smile. His own quick glance was alert and mobile. His look seemed to flit from her eyes to her lips and from her lips to her hands with a sparkling vitality impossible to follow. They seemed to be taking mental measure each of the other in friendly antagonism, like two fencers with buttoned foils.

She gave a little short laugh, half pleased, half embarrassed, like the laugh of some fair masker when she finds herself forced to lay aside her mask.

"I wonder," she said, "how much you know!"

The strange, wrinkled face fell at once into an expression of gravity which rendered it somewhat wistful and almost ludicrous.

"Nothing—I guess!"

"How much you surmise . . ." she amended, unconsciously using a word towards which he had a decided conversational penchant.

"Everything. My mind is in a fevered state of surmise."

He sat leaning forward with his arms resting on his dapper knees, with a keen, expectant look upon his nervous face. He was just a little suggestive of a monkey waiting to catch a nut.

The lady leant back in her chair meditating deeply. She was viewing her position, and perhaps remembering that her acquaintance with this man was but of three months' growth.

"Is there anything to be done?" she asked, after a lengthened pause.

"I counted," he answered, "that I would put that question to you."

She nodded her head gravely.

"I thought perhaps that as you had come to me, you wished me to help you in something."

He looked distressed, for her meaning was obvious.

"No—I came to you . . . because . . . well, because you seemed the right person to come to."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That is a mistake."

"Why?" he asked.

"Don't you see that I can do nothing, that I am powerless?"

He shook his head before replying tersely—

"Can't say I do. I do not know how these things are done in England, but . . ."

She interrupted him with a short laugh in which there was a noticeable ring of annoyance.

"It is not a question of how they are done in England. There can only be one way of doing it all the world over."

"And who is to do it, Miss Winter?"

"You, Mr. Easton."

"And," he continued imperturbably, "what am I to do?"

"Well . . . I should go to Mr. Tyars and say: 'Claud Tyars, you cannot go on this expedition—you have no right to sacrifice the happiness of . . . of another to the gratification of your own personal ambition.'"

"I can't do that," he said, deliberately.

"Won't," she corrected.

"Can't," he persisted, politely.

"Why?"

"I can't tell you."

"Won't, again," she commented.

"I do not see," he argued, defending himself in anticipation, "that any one is to blame. It is an unforeseen accident; a misfortune."

"It is a great misfortune."

"And yet," he pleaded, looking at her in a curious way, "it could not have been foreseen. We are all of us liable to such misfortunes. I had no reason to suspect that Tyars was more liable than myself. It might have happened to me."

"Yes," she answered, more softly, without raising her eyes. "Yes, it might."

He had uttered the words in such a manner as to render the thought infinitely ludicrous. She thought that such a thing might happen to him. And yet somehow she failed to laugh. Perhaps there was an undercurrent of pathos in the thin pleasant voice, into which her thoughts had drifted.

"I cannot say," she continued, "that I foresaw it, for that was impossible. There was no time. But . . . I think I knew it the moment I saw them together, when Oswin brought him to dine at Brook Street. They had met before, some years ago, at Oxford, you know."

"Then," he said, in a relieved tone, "I surmise the matter is out of our hands."

"It never was in our hands, Mr. Easton," corrected the lady.

He looked wistfully uneasy, as if caught in the act of enunciating high treason.

"No," he said, meekly.

"Such matters are rarely in the hands of outsiders, and in those rare cases only to a very small extent."

"No—yes," he conceded with additional meekness.

In his airy way Matthew Mark Easton was a wise man. He held his peace and waited. In the expressive language of his native land, it may be said that he let the lady "have the floor." The question was one upon which he eagerly allowed his companion to have the first and longest say. He was rather awed by the proportions of it, treated generally, and by the intricacies of the individual illustration of which he formed an unwilling figure.

"I have done my best," she said, "to put a stop to this extremely foolish expedition. I notice you look surprised, Mr. Easton; that is hardly complimentary, for it would insinuate that my efforts were so puny as to have been overlooked entirely."

He denied this with an expressive gesture of the hand.

"Of course," she continued, "if men choose to risk their lives unnecessarily, I suppose there is no actual law to stop them. But they should first look

round in their own home circle, and see that their lives are entirely their own to risk. Foolhardiness, entailing anxiety for others, is little short of a crime. Men lose sight of this fact very often in their desire to convince the world of their courage and enterprise. Claud Tyars ought never to have gone to Brook Street."

"But how was he to know?"

"He knew," said the lady, deliberately, "that he loved Helen. He knew that he had loved her ever since he was a boy."

"But," argued Easton, "the fact of his loving her could scarcely be looked upon as a crime so long as he kept it to himself. Tyars is deep. I do not often know what he is driving at myself. He never asked Miss Grace to reciprocate his feelings."

Miss Winter laughed in derision.

"What have I done? I surmise I've made a joke," said Easton.

"Excuse my laughter," she said. "But you obviously know so little about it. Do you actually imagine that Helen Grace does not know, and has not known all along, that Claud Tyars looks upon her as the only woman in the world, so far as he is concerned?"

"I have hitherto imagined that, Miss Winter."

"Then you have never been in love."

He looked at her with twinkling eyes, and seemed to be on the point of saying something which, however, he never did, and she continued rather hurriedly—

"Let me warn you," she said, "against a very common error. Men, and especially young men, are in the habit of believing that women evolve a love for them out of their own inner consciousness. They go about the world with a pleased sense of uncertainty as to the number of maidens who have fixed, hopelessly and unsought, their wayward affections upon them."

Easton acknowledged the truth of this statement by a quick nod of the head.

"You may take it," continued the lady, "as a rule almost without exception, that girls *never* give their love to a man unsought. The man may not speak of his love, but he betrays it, and the result is the same. A girl may admire a man, she may be ready to love him, but the only thing that can attract her love is his. I know I am right in this, Mr. Easton. It is the fashion to rant about the incomprehensibility of women, but we understand each

other. If Mr. Tyars had been indifferent to Helen she would never . . ."

She stopped, arrested by a quick movement of his hand.

"Don't!" he said, with that peculiar deliberation which is a transatlantic demonstration of shyness; "don't say any more on that point. There are certain things which we men do not like discussing."

She gave a little laugh, and changed colour like a girl.

"I admire your chivalry," she said. "It is genuine, and consequently rare."

"I did not know," he answered, simply, "that it was chivalry. If it is, Miss Grace has taught it to me. It is her due. She reminds me of an old picture I must have seen somewhere when I was a little chap. Such girls must have lived in England when we roamed in the backwoods. We have none like them in my country. Discuss Tyars as much as you like, but do not let us talk about Miss Grace."

"I believe," said the lady, "that you are half in love with her yourself."

"No," he answered, gravely, "I am not, because . . . well, no matter—that does not count."

"I wish," Agnes Winter went on to add, in that peculiarly hurried way previously noticed, "that we knew what to do."

"I," he said, "can only tell you one thing, namely, that Claud Tyars will go on this expedition. Nothing will prevent that. Besides—he must go."

"Why?" pleaded the lady, using unscrupulously all her powers of fascination, all the persuasion of her eyes.

"I cannot tell you."

"You are as determined a man as Claud Tyars himself."

"I am, I reckon—in some things."

"Surely you can trust me, Mr. Easton."

He moved uneasily in his seat, and she, taking advantage of his hesitation, leant forward with her two hands held out in supplication; then he seemed to yield.

"Because," he said, in an even, emotionless voice, "Claud Tyars has bound himself to go, and I will not let him off his contract! It is my expedition."

He hardly expected her to believe it, knowing Tyars and himself as she did. But he was quite

aware that he laid himself open to a blow on the sorest spot in his heart.

"Then why do you not go yourself, Mr. Easton?"

He winced under it all the same, though he made no attempt to justify himself. She had touched his pride, and there is no prouder man on earth than a high-bred North American. He merely sat and endeavoured to keep his lips still, as Tyars would have managed to do. In a second Miss Winter saw the result of the taunt, and her generous heart was softened.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I know there must be some good reason."

She waited in order to give him an opportunity of setting forth his good reason, but he refused to take it, and she never had the satisfaction of hearing it from his own lips.

At this moment the front-door bell gave a good old-fashioned peal in the basement, and Easton rose to his feet at once.

"I believe," he said, "that it would be inexpedient for me to be seen here by Miss Grace, or Oswin, or Tyars. They would know what we had been talking about."

Miss Winter saw the correctness of his judgment.

"Yes," she answered, "I expect it is Helen. Come into this second drawing-room. When you hear this door opened, go out of the other and down-stairs. Good-bye. Come and see me again."

"I will," he said, vanishing into the inner room.

CHAPTER XIV.

EASTON MAKES A STAND.

THERE is one distinct drawback to the practice of making disinterested endeavours. This lies in the simple fact that no one (not even the best of friends) believes in the motive of such endeavours. A disinterested man is like the sea-serpent, inasmuch as those who have met him are so systematically poohpoohed that they begin to disbelieve the evidence of their own senses. A disinterested woman is still rarer, though one might find such a creature if one took the trouble to search, and lived long enough to do so systematically.

But the disinterested woman was a specimen of the human kind which had not yet come to classification in the mind of Matthew Mark Easton. He effected his retreat with masterly success, but was unfortunate enough to carry away with him a wrong impression; namely, that Miss Winter had endeavoured to frustrate his plans, not for Helen's sake, but for her own. It was not Claud Tyars whom she wished to keep in

England, but Oswin Grace, and in the meantime it was very convenient to assign an impersonal reason to her antagonism. Easton thought no less of Miss Winter because she adopted this ruse. He had been reared in a keen competitive school, teaching some-what vague scruples; and in matters of love it is well known that the line is very lightly drawn that separates the honourable from the dishonourable.

Easton was a keen analyst of the smaller factors of daily existence. He was an expert on the sur-face of the human mind. Without making any great study of character, without looking very deep for motives, his knowledge of the superficial was ex-ceedingly varied. Little conversational and social habits rarely escaped his notice. Had he been a novelist he would have recorded with infinite subtlety the small-beer of social intercourse from which is distilled the drachm of spirit called Individuality. But beyond that his powers would have been unable to reach. He could not have drawn a character with any sequence, although the same might be hidden in the unclassified mass of his chronicles. And, after all, his method had its good points. He may have made mistakes; but you may study human nature all your life, by any method whatsoever, and you will do the same. Many of us, you know, are

devoid of character. The majority of us without doubt are in this position. We (the majority) are all superficies and no depth, all small-beer and no spirit. And so the superficial method is probably the safest. One meets with more momentary motives than permanent purposes, although in many cases the former in their number tend directly or indirectly to the service of a single purpose. These cases, however, are generally women, and the gentle divergence of all small motives to one great purpose is not the force of the character, but the tendency of the soul. We may read character, but the soul is illegible. One can foretell the career of character, but no man can say whither the soul shall lead.

Easton had studied Miss Winter in his superficial way, and during the conversation just recorded he had not failed to observe the apparent care taken by her to avoid mentioning the name of Oswin Grace. Some astute readers may think that there was a reason for this keen-sightedness. Perhaps it was so, but that will be seen hereafter. And in anticipation of possible criticism it may be well to recognize now the probability that some may think these people too subtle in their motives, too secret, too much given to concealment to be quite natural. Some may opine that there are too many cross purposes and crooked

answers in this narration to be quite true to life. But it is this very truth that makes it so, for this is no flight of poesy, no idyll of the nineteenth century, but a plain record of such incidents as influenced the lives of certain people, some of whom will read this page, while others have learnt the meaning of it all; and, having received understanding, are aware of those flaws in mortal life which make existence what it is. And in self-defence let me ask you if *you* have never played this same game of cross purposes and crooked answers. Let me ask if you and your friends are in the habit of boldly publishing the inward thoughts of your hearts in order to save others from harbouring error—if you have met a maiden willing to expose the inward secret of her soul in order to save others from mistakes. It is a fruitful topic, this one of mistakes, and some day I shall write an astounding essay upon it for an influential magazine, when requested to do so by its editor. Without mistakes the world would be a very different place from what it is. Looking at it from a political economical point of view this state of infallibility would be most disastrous, for the labour-market would be overstocked even more than it is at present. In every bank, in all large offices, are there not a number of clerks whose sole duty is to seek for and correct the mis-

takes of others? And contemplating it from a social standpoint, many of us would find time hanging very heavily on our hands had we not such fruitful employment in the correction of our own mistakes, the patching up of our own blunders, the elucidating of our own muddles.

Matthew Mark Easton was a quick thinker if not a deep one, and it is those who think quickly who give quickly. This man had something to give, something to tear away from his own heart and hold out with generous smiling eyes, and before Miss Winter's door had closed behind him the sacrifice was made. He called a hansom-cab and drove straight to Tyars' club. He found his friend at work among his ship's papers, folding and making up in packets his receipted bills.

"Morning," said the Englishman. "These papers are almost ready to be handed over to you. All my stores are on board!"

"Ah!"

Tyars looked up sharply, and as sharply returned to his occupation. Easton was grave—an unusual occurrence, and Tyars knew that he had come with news of some sort. He waited, however, for the American to begin, and continued to fold and arrange his papers.

"I have," said Easton, sitting down and tapping the neat toe of his boot with his cane, "hit quite accidentally upon a discovery . . ."

"Poor chap!" muttered Tyars, abstractedly.

"Which will make a difference in your crew."

"What?" exclaimed Tyars, pausing in the middle of a knot.

"One rule," continued Easton, his queer little face twisting and twinkling with some emotion, which he was endeavouring to conceal, "was that no sweethearts or wives were to be left behind."

"What are you driving at?" asked Tyars, curtly, in a singularly lifeless voice.

He was studying a long ship-chandler's bill with the keenness of an accountant.

"I surmise that my recollection of that rule is correct."

"I suppose so."

"Well—" Easton paused. "Well, old man, I have discovered a sweetheart."

"Don't be an ass!"

There was something in the tone of his voice that caused Easton to glance at him keenly and then drop entirely the semi-bantering manner and assume one of the utmost gravity.

"I objected to Grace at first," he said, "because he had too many women-folk about him."

Tyars threw the papers in a heap and rose suddenly from his seat. He walked to the mantel-piece and selected a cigarette from a tin box standing there.

"Of course," he said, striking a match, "your discovery can only relate to one person."

"Yes; you know whom I mean."

Tyars nodded his head in acquiescence and continued smoking. The little American sat looking in a curious way at this large, impassive, high-bred Englishman, as if gathering enjoyment and edification from the study of him.

"Well," he drawled at length, "you say nothing!"

"There is nothing to say."

"On the contrary," returned Easton, "there is everything to say. That is one of the great mistakes made by you English people. I have noticed it since I have been in this country. You take too much for granted. You let things say themselves too much, and you think it very fine to be impassive and apparently indifferent. But it is not a fine thing, it is silly and unbusiness-like. Do you give up Oswin Grace?"

"Certainly; if you can get him to stay behind."

"Ya—as; he is another Englishman. He will run his head against a wall if he can. That is to say if there is a thick enough wall around."

Tyars laughed, and turned to flip his cigarette-ash into the fire.

"I have tried," he said, "to make him give it up."

Easton looked up in surprise.

"Indeed! upon what grounds?"

"Upon the grounds that he had ties at home which rendered him unfit for such service."

"Sister?" inquired the American.

"Yes"—slowly—"sister."

There was a little pause, and then Easton said thoughtfully—

"It is remarkable how much stronger an argument somebody else's sister is in these cases."

"U—m," opined Tyars, somewhat indifferently. He evidently did not know much about the matter.

"What did Grace say?" inquired the American, calmly.

"Oh, I don't know. He turned very white about the cheeks, and was evidently in a desperate fright."

"I suppose—he is a good man. The man you want?"

"Yes; he is the man I want."

Easton meditated for a few moments.

"And still you will give him up?"

"Yes; there are plenty of men to be had."

"Tyars, will you speak to him again," said Easton, rising and taking up his hat, "and use . . . that other argument?"

Tyars hesitated. "I am not quite sure that it is my business," he said. "I hate meddling in other people's affairs, and after all I suppose Grace knows best what he is doing."

"Men rarely know what they are doing under these circumstances," observed Easton.

He waited patiently, hat in hand, to hear what Tyars had to say. While he stood there, Muggins, the bull-terrier, rose from the hearthrug, stretched himself, and looked from one to the other in an inquiring and anticipatory manner. He took it to be a question of going for a walk, and apparently imagined that the casting vote was his.

"All right," said Tyars, suddenly, "I will speak to him again!"

"To-day," pursued Easton, following up his advantage, "or to-morrow at the latest."

"Yes; to-morrow at the latest."

Then the American took his departure, and Mug-

gins curled himself up on the hearthrug again with a yawn of disappointment.

There are moments in the lives of most men when they feel themselves impelled by some vague instinct to seek advice. It does not by any means follow that they are prepared to be guided by such advice, nor are these occasions invariably critical. Indeed most men make the greater decisions of their lives quite alone, seeking the advice of none, following no example. But in the minor crises of existence, and more especially in regard to matters affecting others more than ourselves, the instinctive gregariousness of our nature asserts itself.

Claud Tyars admired Miss Winter more than he admired any woman. The power of her clear practical intellect was full of fascination for him, and she was the woman he would have chosen to consult in such questions as men habitually consult women. In this case it happened that she was just the one person whose advice it was impossible to seek. Helen Grace could have counselled him wisely and sweetly, but for reasons of his own he set aside unhesitatingly the idea of questioning her, and he knew that she would never proffer advice unasked.

This man was, as he had told Helen Grace, quite alone in the world. Coming as he did from a

solitude-loving stock, he was placed in that grade of life to which solitude is most readily obtainable. The upper middle-class gentleman of England lives a larger portion of his life alone than almost any class of men on earth. Those above him are usually forced by their rank to occupy positions of prominence in the world, are therefore public servants, and consequently at the public beck and call. Those beneath him are not rich enough to purchase solitude. They live in small houses surrounded by wife and children, within call of the servants, and not beyond the smell of cooking.

Since meeting Matthew Mark Easton, Tyars had withdrawn himself from society gently and persistently, with the view of furthering his Quixotic scheme, and in this project circumstances were again favourable to him. He occupied that safe retreat between the haunt of the insupportable society journalist and the kind-hearted curiosity of the bourgeois. In all large communities the art of "doing without" is highly cultivated. It is only in very small circles and in Scotch song-books that people are missed for longer than a few days. It is a great pity that we have such difficulty in recognizing our own unimportance. If we did so we should be much more independent and study our own inclinations before the consideration

of feelings erroneously supposed to exist in the hearts of our friends and relations.

Claud Tyars was never missed, and to do him justice he was supremely indifferent on this point. It was only at odd moments on shore when he happened to be idle during some rare periods that he gave any thought to the loneliness of his life. And in one respect he was essentially British: namely, in the calm readiness with which he undertook to settle all questions for himself. When these questions affected his fellow-men he rarely saw reason to hesitate, for most Englishmen learn as soon as they leave the nursery what is right and what is wrong; what is gentlemanly and what the reverse. But this knowledge from its source can only serve as a guide to conduct in regard to men. At the period when it is really instilled, namely, during the first few years at school, woman occupies a remarkably obscure position in the youthful mind. At no time of man's life is woman so unimportant, and therefore the boy learns and only cares to learn behaviour towards his fellow-men; moreover, that which he then learns will go with him through all the fair weather and the foul, through all the storm, and through what little sunshine there may be, till the evening of his life, and the glow of it will linger over his memory as the

hushed glow of sunset lingers over a fading landscape and gives it character.

It is only later in life that we learn our manners, our bows and smirks, our entrances upon and exits from the broader stage of existence. It is then that we awaken to the truth that while men may be served with honesty, women must be treated with chivalry. At the same time we find out that chivalry and honesty are not akin, nor near thereto. It is not always kind to be honest, and if any man hesitate in the choice, let him be chivalrous and he will scarcely rue it.

Claud Tyars had not learnt chivalry at the best school, his mother's knee, for he had never stood there, and it was therefore no subtle superficial acquirement, but the honest instinctive love of fair play between strong and weak that prompted him to accede to Easton's request.

CHAPTER XV.

AND TYARS MAKES AN EFFORT.

LIKE most persons living and acting alone—gathering as it were with their own hands the harvest of their own seed—Claud Tyars was remarkable for quickness of action. Having once determined to make another effort to rid himself of his invaluable lieutenant, he lost no time in putting his thoughts into deeds. In an hour's time he was clambering up the smartly-painted side of the exploring ship *Argo*. It happened to be raining hard—the first tepid rain of spring, a few weeks in advance of the calendar—and he was clad in a long oilskin coat of which one sleeve hung limp, for his arm was not yet sufficiently healed to bear movement. Perhaps these facts accounted for a certain slowness of gait amounting almost to reluctance as he walked aft towards the companion. He groped his way down the little twisting steps with a clatter of strong boots on the brass-bound tread.

Oswin Grace was seated in the bright little cabin

at a table writing out lists of stores. Many of these same stores were piled on the deck around him, and there was a pleasant odour of paraffin-oil in the air.

"Morning, old man!" he said abstractedly, drawing the scattered papers towards himself in a heap so as to make more room on the table. At times Oswin Grace felt almost familiar with his self-contained chief.

"Good morning," answered Tyars.

He turned to hang up his gleaming oilskin on a hook just outside the cabin-door, then came back drawing off his wet gloves, which he presently threw down on the deck in front of an eager little copper stove. There was already a sense of homeliness in the manner with which the two men lived and moved and had their being in this little cabin, and Tyars suddenly became conscious of this. He suddenly realized that the cabin, the ship, his whole existence would not be quite the same without the companionship of this broad-shouldered little English sailor. He suddenly became aware of the perfect harmony existing between himself and the man who had given up an honourable career to follow him. Perhaps he caught a passing gleam of light from the other's soul, and saw for a moment into the heart of Oswin Grace, understanding the difficulties that lay

hidden there. Sometimes these little glimpses of life from another point of view are vouchsafed to us, and we hover on the brink of seeing ourselves as others see us. Perhaps Claud Tyars recognized then the great difficulty attached to the occupation of a subordinate position, especially in subordination to a man like himself. An incompetent second-fiddler may make matters extremely inharmonious. Tyars leant over the table and examined one or two accounts in a desultory manner.

"Grace!" he said.

"*Adsum*," replied his companion, cheerfully, without ceasing his work.

Tyars closed the cabin-door with his elbow.

"I do not see," he said, slowly and uncomfortably, "how you can very well go with us."

Grace laid aside his pen and raised his keen gray eyes. His brow was wrinkled, his lips set, his eyes full of fight.

"Why?"

"Because . . ."

Tyars hesitated, and the two Englishmen remained thus for some seconds, each reading the thoughts of the other as best he might, and very imperfectly at the best.

"Because," suggested Grace in a hard voice, "I am in love with Agnes Winter?"

Tyars nodded his head and stooped to pick up his gloves, holding them subsequently close to the bars of the stove, where they steamed gaily. There was a silence of some duration, and every second increased the discomfort of Claud Tyars.

"And you," continued Grace at length very deliberately, "love Helen!"

Tyars stood upright so that his head was very near the beams. He thrust his gloves into his pocket and stood for some seconds grasping his short pointed beard meditatively with his uninjured hand.

"Yes," he said, "I do."

Grace returned to his ship-chandler's bills with the air of a barrister who, having established his point, thinks it prudent to allow time for it to sink into the brains of judge and jury.

"I do not mind telling you," he added carelessly, almost too carelessly, "that Miss Winter—is perfectly indifferent on the subject."

"Do you know that for certain?" asked Tyars, sharply.

"She told me so herself," answered Grace, with a peculiar little laugh which was not pleasant to the ear.

He waited obviously for a reciprocal confidence on the part of Tyars, but he waited in vain. The habit of non-communicativeness is one of very quick growth and its roots are deep. The silence of Oswin Grace asked as distinctly as words could have done, "Is Helen as indifferent as Agnes Winter?"—and Tyars was conscious of the question. He even made an effort to tear down the barrier that fenced his heart round, but an old habit is a strong antagonist. He could not overcome that deep-seated dislike to the discussion of all things appertaining to thoughts or feelings, which is so characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race. But he tacitly abandoned all attempts then and for ever to induce Oswin Grace to relinquish his purpose. It was a tame ending to all his resolutions, but his hands were tied, the wind was knocked out of his sails, the tables were turned upon him.

Claud Tyars was not one of those fatuous young men who imagine that they can conceal anything for very long from the world. But he had hitherto been under the impression that his love for Helen Grace was a matter known only to himself and Helen, suspected only by Miss Winter. And after all, if a man makes a point of avoiding entirely the woman he loves, and thus does away with the danger of be-

traying himself in her presence by manner, speech, or silence, he is assuredly justified in priding himself on the security of his secret. Tyars could tell on the fingers of his two hands the number of times he had spoken to Helen Grace since his return to England, and one hand would suffice to numerate the interviews which had taken place in the presence of Oswin. It is possible that in the elaboration of his plans for concealing his love from Helen herself and keeping it hidden from the keen eyes of Miss Winter and Matthew Mark Easton, he had overlooked the man who, while quietly working at his side, was acquiring a fuller cognizance of his plans, and hopes, and fears than that possessed by the American himself. This was very likely, because it is a mistake we make every day of our lives. We are always looking into distances and neglecting that which is near at hand.

Oswin Grace was the first to speak, quietly shelving his own affairs with that philosophy of resignation which is best understood by those who have been brought to manhood under discipline.

"Of course," he said, "I have no desire to meddle with your affairs. I ask no questions, and I look for no spontaneous confidences. It will be better for

you to lose sight altogether of the coincidence that I am—her brother."

Tyars had seated himself on the corner of the cabin-table, with his back half turned towards his companion. He had picked up a piece of straw, of which there was a quantity lying on table and floor, and this he was biting meditatively. It was as yet entirely a puzzle to him, and this was only a new complication. He could not understand it, just as better men than Claud Tyars have failed to understand it all through. For no one, I take it, does understand love, and no man can say whither it will lead.

"There need," continued Oswin Grace, perforating a series of small holes in his blotting-paper with the point of a cedar-wood pencil, "be no nonsense of that sort. I am not going to take it upon myself to watch over Helen's interests; they are much safer in your hands than in mine."

Still Tyars said nothing, and after a little pause Grace went on in measured, thoughtful tones, carrying with them the weight of deliberation.

"There is one point," he said, "upon which I think there must be an understanding."

"Yes," said Tyars, anxiously.

"Any risks—extra risks, such as boat-work, night-

work up aloft—these must be mine. From what you have said I gather that your intention was to be skipper, and yet do the rough work as well. When anything hazardous is to be done, I shall do it. You must stick to the ship."

The big man gave a little annoyed laugh.

"It is your duty not only towards—her, but towards the rest of us. A skipper has no right to risk his life if he can get some one of less value to risk his."

"I am not aware of any intention to deprive you of your share of the dirty work."

"You are not *conscious* of it, you mean, old fellow!" corrected Grace, "but I am. I have been conscious of it all along. I have got my knife into you now, and if you do not submit I shall woggle it about and cause you some discomfort."

The words were spoken pleasantly, almost playfully; but Tyars turned in some vague astonishment to look at his companion, and saw a look in the keen gray eyes which he had not perceived there since Oswin Grace took command of the *Martial* over his head. It was not defiance, for English eyes do not look defiance except in books; but it breathed that high-born quiet determination which knows exactly

where to draw the line between discipline and servitude.

Tyars laughed and turned away his glance. It was a bold stroke, and Oswin Grace had dealt it diplomatically; for the feeling of tension that had been in the atmosphere of the little cabin seemed to relax, and a fuller understanding crept in between the two men.

"I have no doubt," said Tyars, seating himself at the table and beginning to open his letters, "that we are all constructing a very fine mountain out of materials intended for a mole-hill. I for one have no intention of leaving my bones in the far North. There is no reason why we should not all be back home by this time next year."

"None at all," agreed Oswin, somewhat perfunctorily, adding with a suspicion of doubt the next minute, "Suppose we succeed?"

"Well, what then?"

"Suppose we get there all right, rescue the men and go on safely; we get over the elemental danger, and then we have to face the political, which is worse."

"I do not see it," replied Tyars. "We sell the ship at San Francisco. Half the crew expect to be paid off there, the other half will disperse with their

passage-money in their pockets, and very few of them will find their way back to England. Our doctor is a German Socialist, with several aliases; our second mate a simple-minded Norwegian whaling-skipper. The exiles do not know a word of English, or pretend they do not, and none of the crew speak Russian. There will be absolutely no intercourse on board, and only you, the doctor, and myself will ever know who the rescued men really are. The crew will imagine that they are the survivors of a Russian ivory-hunting expedition, and if the truth ever comes out it will be impossible to prove that you and I knew better."

"But it will not be easy to keep the newspapers quiet."

"We shall not attempt to keep them quiet. It will only be a local matter. The San Francisco papers will publish libellous woodcuts of our countenances and a column or two purporting to be biographical, but the world will be little the wiser. In America such matters are interesting only in so much as they are personal, and there is in reality nothing easier than the suppression of one's personality. There is no difficulty in kicking an interviewer out of the room, just as one would kick out any intruder; and we are quite indifferent as to whether the Ameri-

can newspapers abuse us or not after having been kicked. As to the details of the voyage, I shall withhold those with the view of publishing a book, which is quite the correct thing to do nowadays. The book shall always be in course of preparation, and will never appear."

In this wise the two men continued talking, planning, scheming, all the morning, while they worked methodically and prosaically. Whatever mistakes they may have made, however Quixotic they may have been, there was no fault to find in the manner in which they fitted up their ship and mapped out each detail of their expedition. Whatever else they may have been, they were good sailors; and that is sufficient praise for most men.

They carefully confined their conversation to the future, and avoided all reference to those subjects which had been so lamely and scrappily discussed earlier in the day. Having set their hands to the plough, they seemed, alike, nervously determined to look always ahead, ignoring and quelling all thought of what they were leaving behind them.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ELEVENTH OF MARCH.

EVEN the watched pot boils in time. There comes an end to all things. The painter finally lays aside his brush; the writer at last presses his blotting-paper over "Finis." The composer must some day dot in the last chord to his opera. And these men in reaching the close of their labour complete an era of their lives. The printer also sets up "Finis" in his type, but that action is no item in his existence. It is only the end of a creation that leaves its mark upon the heart;—it is only those who create who lose something when their work is done—who pass on in life with a sense of vacancy somewhere in their being. For that creation, whether it be picture, book, or opus, is part of the man; it has the scent and impress of his Soul, and from his Soul a portion of its virtue has gone out. And yet the completed work is always *there*—the creator is always conscious of its presence, of its companionship

in the world—though it stand neglected on a shelf, or hang unseen in a picture-seller's back shop.

Men who have conceived and have finally brought to completion some great scheme are partakers in this feeling. They too know the joy of creation—perhaps they taste the sweetness of success. It is to be hoped that they do, because success is their guiding-star; it is more necessary to them than to the artist, who finds joy in the act of producing alone.

Matthew Mark Easton did not claim for his scheme the magnitude of a life-long dream. It had been conceived in idleness, and of leisure it was the fruit. But he had lived with it night and day for nearly three years, until he had fallen into the habit of thinking of little else. He had acquired that lamentable custom of looking on men and things from one point of view only—taking interest or feeling indifference in both only as possible factors. But he was unconscious of it all. Like most eloquent men he was ignorant of the distance that he might carry others by his words, and remain unmoved himself. He had carried Claud Tyars, who in turn had dragged him after, not by eloquence, but by the silent force of an absorbed will.

When Easton woke up on the eleventh morning

of March he was conscious of a certain unsteadiness of purpose in minor matters. He failed to dress himself with the quick completeness which usually characterized his toilet. He meditated over his ablutions and dawdled with his razor. His hand was not only slow, but distinctly shaky, and he came very near to bloodshed. He stepped to the window and contemplated the heavens of a pearly green—such as goes by the name of blue sky in London—and this was a man who never displayed the slightest interest in barometrical matters.

This day, the eleventh of March, was fixed for the sailing of the *Argo* exploring vessel, and Easton's chief thought on the subject was a vague wonder as to what he would do with himself after she had gone. This little man rather prided himself upon the possession of a hard and impregnable nineteenth-century heart. He took a certain small pleasure in the reflection that he was as nearly independent as it is possible for any human being to be. Although he was naturally of a gregarious and sociable habit, he held in reserve the thought that the practice of sociability was with him merely a matter of expediency, and not of necessity as it is with some. He could drop all his acquaintances at a moment's notice and never feel the loss. In fact he had of

late cherished the idea of going to San Francisco to await the arrival of the *Argo*. He at all events was sanguine of success.

And yet he was distinctly disturbed this morning of the eleventh of March—disturbed, that is to say, for a man devoid of human tie or sympathy. It is possible that he was surprised at himself, and perhaps annoyed, for he whistled persistently and somewhat aggressively while he dressed.

The *Argo* was to pass out of the tidal basin into the river at one o'clock, and at half-past twelve Easton drove up to the dock-gates. He brought with him the last items of the ship's outfit in the shape of a pile of newspapers, and a bunch of hot-house roses for the cabin-table, for there was to be a luncheon-party on board while steaming down the river.

He found Admiral Grace strolling about the deck with Tyars, conversing in quite a friendly way, and endeavouring honestly to suppress his contempt for seamanship of so young a growth as that of his companion. The ladies were below, inspecting the ship under Oswin's guidance.

The little vessel lay snugly under the high stone quay, and presented the appearance of some quaint, old-fashioned little man-of-war, so spotless were her

decks, so mathematically correct the coiling of every rope, so bright her brass-work. One could have guessed that her first officer had served under the white ensign.

A few idlers stood on the quay with that peaceful sense of contemplation which comes to men who pass their lives near water, and exchanged gruff monosyllables of approval at long and uncertain intervals; varying the same with an interchange of quids, and sociable expectoration.

Easton joined the two sailors after having dropped the roses and newspapers through the open cabin-skylight, and his presence was somewhat of a relief to both.

"She is," he said, addressing himself to the admiral with transatlantic courtesy, "a strange mixture of the man-of-war and the yacht—do you not find it so, sir?"

"She is," answered the old gentleman, guardedly, "one of the most complete vessels I have ever boarded—though her outward appearance is of course against her."

"One can detect," continued the American, looking round with a musing eye, "the influence of a naval officer."

The old gentleman softened visibly. He had been guilty of allowing it to be understood by several of his friends that his son Oswin was virtually in command of this vessel, while Claud Tyars was merely the leader of the expedition. The remembrance of this lapse had been brought back rather rudely to his conscience during the short colloquy that had been interrupted by the advent of Easton, and the admiral was just beginning to smart under a realization of Oswin's comparative unimportance. This impression had certainly not been conveyed with intention, for Tyars was perfectly ignorant of its existence. The simple truth was that he was a commander by nature, while Oswin Grace was cast in a different mould. The naval officer was an excellent subordinate, and in order to excel in this difficult line it is essential to appear unimportant. The value of a good subordinate should be known alone to his immediate superior — the general public should be unsuspicious of his worth. This was precisely the position of Oswin Grace, and looking at it from a naval point of view, it was not untinged with humiliation. Contemplated from a common-sense stand-point it could scarcely have been improved upon; but old gentlemen (like young ones) do not always take this point of view.

"Even to a landlubber like myself," said Easton glibly, "that influence is apparent."

At this moment the ladies appeared, escorted by Oswin Grace—Miss Winter first, with a searching little smile in her eyes. Easton saw that she was very much on the alert.

"I feel quite at home," she said to him, looking round her, "although there are so many changes."

"So do I; the more so because the changes have been made under my own directions."

They walked aft, leaving the rest of the party standing together. As they walked Oswin Grace watched them with a singular light in his clear gray eyes, singular because gray eyes rarely glisten, they only darken at times. Miss Winter and her companion, in silence, watched the pier-head hand cast off the last hawser—the last link between the *Argo* and terra-firma. It happened that the rest of the party were doing the same in a mechanically interested way.

"Does she seem to you," asked Easton, suddenly, "like an unfortunate ship?"

The Gravesend pilot who was standing near to them shouted some instructions to the master of the tug in such stentorian tones that Miss Winter was

compelled to wait a few moments until he had finished his observations.

As she answered, the paddles of the tug revolved with a splash; the tow-rope seethed out of the water, and the *Argo* moved perceptibly.

"No," she answered, "there is a re-assuring air of—of something stronger than *savoir-faire* about the ship which I like."

"*Savoir-faire,*" he suggested, "not only *savoir-dire.*"

"Yes," she answered, with a comprehensive little nod; and they stood watching the tactics of the ship's crew and the dock-hands without understanding very much.

Oswin Grace had gone forward on to the diminutive old-fashioned forecastle. Claud Tyars stood beside the pilot, while the whaling-captain was not far off. There was singularly little shouting. Tyars and Grace never opened their lips. Once Tyars made a little movement with his hand which was rotatory in its tendency. Grace answered with a nod, and spoke quietly to a man beside him, who immediately set a small steam-winch to work. For some moments there was no sound except the convulsive grunts of the winch, and these were finally arrested by a motion of Tyars' hand. These two

men had slept the night before in the West End of London; they had put on their clothes there a few hours before, and in the way in which they wore these clothes (by no means maritime in cut) there was that ineffaceable stamp of the British sportsman with which one comes into contact in many strange places.

Presently the vessel glided smoothly between the slimy gates out into the open river. The tow-line was cast off, and the *Argo's* engines started. The vessel swung slowly round on the greasy waters, pointing her blunt stubborn prow down the misty river. She settled to her work with a docile readiness, like a farmer's mare on the outward road.

"This is a new experience for you," said Easton, with the faint American tinge which came to his tongue in unguarded moments.

"Yes," Miss Winter answered, "I did not want to come."

"Ah!"—he looked up aloft where a boy was at work on a tiny yard-arm. She did not however continue, so he encouraged her. "Why did you not want to come?"

"I knew we should be horribly in the way. I am always conscious of being in the way on a ship

that is not securely tied down all round—moored, I mean."

"I do not detect any signs of annoyance on the part of the—executive."

"No," admitted Miss Winter. "One would say that it had all been carefully rehearsed."

"Then what is the true reason?" he inquired, coolly—almost too coolly for a man of his temperament.

"I do not know. I am nervous. I dislike the dramatic . . ."

"The unrehearsed?" he suggested.

She gave a little laugh and turned away to look at a brown-sailed barge which was scudding across the river astern of them.

"Yes, the unrehearsed."

"But," he said, "there is no drama. We are a light-comedy company. We make nice little jokes and laugh at them enthusiastically. I surmise, at least, that we shall do so. The corners of my mouth are beginning to turn up already."

"I came on board," said Miss Winter, gravely, "with a broad smile which I expected to last me all day, but it appears to have faded."

He looked at her critically in his peculiar twinkling way, not untinged however with concern.

"Yes," he admitted, "it has. You must polish it up for luncheon. I intend to be intensely funny, and I guess you will have to laugh."

"I suppose Mr. Tyars will be of no assistance."

"Not of the very smallest. He is not good at that sort of thing—deep people, I take it, never are; it is only shallow water that sparkles in a breeze."

"I am still of opinion that it is a pity we came," said the lady, making a little movement to join the other group. Perhaps she was conscious of Oswin's occasional glances in her direction, but if she was there was nothing in her manner to betray it.

"I always was of that opinion," admitted the American, following her, "but I could not prevent it."

Then they joined Admiral Grace and Helen. Presently, and before any conversation had passed, Tyars and Oswin came up together. Helen was standing slightly apart, and the delicately-embarrassed interest which she was still showing in everything, was not the strangeness of a landswoman to all things maritime; it was a new-born shyness which she could not have defined herself—a sudden maidenly fear of betraying too great an interest in any one man, or the handiwork of any one man,

Whatever it may have been, it lent an additional fascination to her grave young face, for the controlled shyness of a man or woman is always pleasant to meet. To Helen Grace it was infinitely becoming, it suggested in some subtle way the glow of youth, the fresh savour of inexperience. She must have looked like that at her first ball, when gaslight had no suggestion of its native coal; when smiles were only smiles, and never masks; when she had been happy to take the surface of things.

Tyars approached her, and stood by her side with that grave attention which a pre-occupied man accords to those women who command his respect. Then suddenly, in his abrupt way, he spoke.

"You will never see this ship again," he said.

She made a little movement with her head and throat, as if a sudden chill had caused her to shiver.

"What do you mean?"

"We are going to sell her out there—at San Francisco."

"Ah—yes," she murmured with evident relief.

The effort to talk of commonplace matters in a commonplace way was a trifle *en évidence* on both sides.

"Do you admire the ship?" he asked, looking

steadily at her as one looks at one's partner when the game hangs on a balance. "What is your opinion of her?"

The girl made an effort.

"Oh," she replied with a clear, firm smile, "of course I know nothing about it; but my first impression was surprise at her diminutiveness. She still seems to me absurdly small. I am woefully ignorant on nautical matters, and size appeals to me as safety."

"In this case size has little to do with safety. In fact, the smaller we are the stronger we shall be as long as we can carry all we wish. We have sent on our coal, you know, by another steamer."

"To wait for you?"

"Yes, to wait for me—for us."

It was a foolish mistake to make, but it was just one of those mistakes which the tongue sometimes takes it upon itself to perpetrate, and the brain, however alert it may be, is for the moment paralyzed. It is a dangerous pastime to think of one thing and to talk of another. Some of us pride ourselves that we can keep up one conversation and listen to another at the same time.

Claud Tyars had been talking with his brain while his tongue was listening to his heart; and it was singular how complete his betrayal was. So small a slip might easily have passed unnoticed, but before he had even time to alter the pronoun Helen changed colour. He heard the quick, gasping breath, and although he did not dare to look in her direction, he was conscious of her quickly-averted face.

Taking into consideration the social experience they must both have possessed—considering that they had danced together eight years before—they were singularly *gauches*. They did a very unwise thing; they allowed the incident to be magnified into a silence—one of those horrid silences which come in times of pressure, when there is a strain in the atmosphere.

Parting words may be very sad, very weighty, very eloquent, but they are infinitely kinder than parting silences. Which think you to be more weighty; the few broken words of a dying man—the recommendations, the instructions, the advice—or the breathless silence when he sinks back on the weary pillow, and in the concentration of his eyes one can read all that is unsaid—all that is never said in this

world, and for which there can be no need in the next? It was Claud Tyars who finally spoke.

"Come," he said with a peculiar twisted smile; "luncheon is ready. Let us lead the way, and the others will follow."

CHAPTER XVII.

OFF!

HAD an acute but uninitiated observer been introduced into the little cabin of the *Argo* during the consumption of the delicate repast provided by her officers, he or she could scarcely have failed to notice a certain recklessness of hilarity among the party assembled. Admiral Grace was the only one who really did justice to the steward's maiden and supreme effort, and he in consequence was singular in failing to appreciate the witticisms of Matthew Mark Easton and Oswin Grace. This was perhaps owing to the fact that when we have passed the half-way milestone in life we fail to appreciate the most brilliant conversation if it be served up with savoury viands and choice wine. This, I say, was perhaps the reason; for we cannot always tell how much silent old gentlemen see and note while enjoying the fullest flavour of their sherry. It is just possible that Admiral Grace did not think very much of the wit—taken as wit pure and simple. His position was not unique. You

and I, *mon vieux,* know perhaps something about it. We also may have found ourselves in the midst of a party of young people who seem to have an object in attempting very lamely to deceive each other. We also may have listened to very feeble witticisms recognized by silvery laughter that follows too quickly on the heels of the sally to be natural, and we also may have turned philosophically to the *menu* with a feeling that something was going on—something vague and subtle, fit only for young minds to understand.

Once or twice Easton's words recurred to Miss Winter: "I intend to be intensely funny, and I guess you will have to laugh." This was her cue, and she acted up to it.

On the finite principle the meal came to an end also, and a move was made. There was nothing else to do but to go on deck, which was not so unpleasant a resort as it might have been with an east wind. The admiral and Easton were accommodated with cigars, the ladies with deck-chairs, under the friendly cover of a windsail. There happened to be very few steamers going down the river, and the *Argo* glided forward on the unctuously moving water with that semi-helpless clumsiness which characterizes the movement of a steamer on the bosom of a strong

tide. In certain reaches of the river they were quite alone, and only at times they passed a Medway sailing-barge floating down to Sheerness. Occasionally a bluff weather-beaten fish-carrier or a tall-funnelled tug would steam busily past them, up-stream; but for the time all the ocean traffic seemed to be suspended. Doubtless the inward-bound liners were lying miles below, at Gravesend, conscious of having missed a tide. The denser forest of tall chimneys had been left behind, and only at intervals was either bank disfigured by slow smoking monuments of industry. The left bank lay low and dank, while to the right the watershed of Kent began already to rise in tree-covered slopes.

"Where are we?" asked Miss Winter, with a certain determined cheerfulness.

It was Tyars who answered.

"We have passed Greenwich and Woolwich; over there is Plumstead Marsh."

Miss Winter followed the direction of his outstretched hand. She belonged to the essentially sedentary circle of the West End of London, and to her Woolwich and Greenwich were merely names; the one connected with an arsenal, the other with a bygone custom of dining on a simple little fish. To her such names as Cubitt Town, Plumstead, Rain-

ham, and Purfleet were totally unknown. There was a little silence during which both ladies looked around them with simulated interest. Tyars seemed to divine an unasked question.

"Over there is Gravesend. It is just behind that high land. The smoke you see there is from the town; we shall be there in an hour," he said.

"And do you stop—anchor, or whatever it is?" inquired Miss Winter, looking away from Helen with an almost noticeable persistence.

"No—we go on—to sea—to-night," Tyars answered crisply, with a quick glance in the direction avoided by Miss Winter. Then he turned and looked at his interlocutress as if to enjoy the triumph of having baffled her. For a moment she was conscious of a subtle humiliation—she felt as if she were forming part of a victor's triumphal procession. The next instant she smiled into his eyes. A woman rather likes the degradation of being overcome by a man; it keeps up her healthy respect for the sex—a respect which few of us cultivate with conspicuous success.

"As I was telling Miss Grace before lunch," continued Tyars, before the pause grew irksome, "you will not see this old ship again."

"So Oswin told me. You both speak of it in a

very heartless way. I always understood that sailors were so devoted to their ships."

"Seems," said Oswin, "rather like hiring a man to save your life, and dismissing him with a shilling extra and a smile when he has done it."

"We could not bring the ship back so far from sentimental motives," said Tyars, in a matter-of-fact way; and he spoke with that hardness which is only found in certain ranges of society, and strange to say, one finds it in the same social altitude in France as in England. Its chief characteristic is negative, for it conveys a subtle and yet flat refusal to admit that there is anything in life worth getting flurried about. It will not recognize the existence of any emotion which cannot be lived down. And yet these people, educated descendants of educated men and women, are just those who know how to suffer most. Education and hereditary refinement are the seed and hot-bed of that sensibility to which pain can be most cruel. This is no doubt only another illustration of that serene adaptability to circumstances which characterizes the workings of Nature in everything. If the body can adapt itself, if one eye can assume the responsibility of two, if one lung can do its fellow's work in addition to its own, why should not the heart learn to adapt itself to new emotions?

For new emotions must be provided; is there not a quill-wielding army seeking daily for them? And these new emotions bring new antidotes. There are many cures as there are many maladies of the heart —the ridicule cure, the cynicism cure, the novelty cure, the excitement cure, but surest of all the living-down. As in physical diseases there are certain tough hearts to which only the strongest anticor can penetrate, and for these the living-down cure is alone effectual. Claud Tyars was just the man to adopt at once and with forethought the most stringent measures. In this he only followed the instincts of the class of which he was an unusually perfect specimen—the hard-limbed product of English public school and university. If one takes a square inch of bone from the leg of a thorough-bred horse and place it in comparison with the same portion taken from the limb of a dray-horse, the magic touch of breed and blood can be detected at once. The thorough-bred bone is hard and close and white like ivory; the other is gray and porous. So is it with human hearts—that of the man or woman descended from refined and educated ancestors is purer and whiter and more delicate; but it is also harder. Claud Tyars was no doubt a hard-hearted man, else he would not have slipped so readily into the post of

command which seemed to be waiting for him. He had a strong belief in the subservience of the emotions to convenience. He was the very antitype to those individuals who fall in love with barmaids or run amuck among the prejudices of their relatives. And so, after all, he assisted Miss Winter and Matthew Mark Easton beyond their expectation. Presently he left the group, for he had other duties to attend to, although the pilot was in charge. There was no confusion, no shouting on board this little ship, but all went smoothly with that mixed discipline of the yacht and the man-of-war which Easton had commented upon.

The moments dwindled on with the slow, dragging monotony which characterizes latest moments, and makes us almost impatient to see the last of faces which we shall perhaps never look upon again. Presently the town of Gravesend hove in sight, and all on the quarter-deck of the *Argo* gazed at it as they might have gazed on some unknown Eastern city after traversing the desert. And then after all —all the waiting, the preparation, the counting of moments, and the calculating of distances—the bell in the engine-room came as a surprise. There was something startling in the clang of the gong as the engineer replied.

Helen was the last to rise. She stood holding the shawl which Oswin had spread over her knees, and looked round with a strange intense gaze. There are moments when the human brain becomes sensitized like a photographer's dry-plate, and the impressions received during those moments are clear, distinct, and imperishable like a finished photograph.

The steamer was now drifting slowly on the tide with resting engines. There were two boats rowing towards her from Gravesend Pier, one a low, green-painted wherry for the pilot, the other a larger boat with stained and faded red cushions. The scene—the torpid yellow river, the sordid town and low river-side warehouses—could scarce have been exceeded for pure unvarnished dismalness.

Already the steps were being lowered. In a few moments the larger boat swung alongside, held by a rope made fast in the forecastle of the *Argo*. A general move was made towards the rail. Tyars passed out on to the gangway, where he stood waiting to hand the ladies into the boat. Helen was near to her brother; she turned to him and kissed him in silence. Then she went to the gangway. There was a little pause, and for a moment Helen and Tyars were left alone at the foot of the brass-bound steps.

"Good-bye," said Tyars.

There was a slight prolongation of the last syllable as if he had something else to say; but he never said it, although she gave him time.

"Good-bye," she answered at length, and she too seemed to have something to add which was never added.

Then she stepped lightly into the boat and took her place on the faded red cushions.

The *Argo* went to sea that night. There was much to do, although everything seemed to be in its place, and every man appeared to know his duty. It thus happened that Tyars and Grace had not a moment to themselves until well on into the night. The watch was set at eight o'clock. For a moment Tyars paused before leaving his chief officer alone on the little bridge.

"What a clever fellow Easton is!" he said. "I never recognized it until this afternoon."

"Um-m," returned Oswin Grace, without lowering his glasses.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HORRIBLE TASK.

THERE are many people who go through life without ever knowing what it is to fight a gale of wind. Dwellers in cities know indeed that the wild winds blow when they hear the hum of strained wires overhead, when the dust rises in whirls at every street corner, when the sanitary *employés* have difficulty in capturing small truant paper-bags that refuse to recognize their cart or power, and when it is really inconvenient to wear high hats and light-minded skirts.

Those who live at the edge of the sea will never admit that they know little about a gale of wind, when at equinoctial periods their windows require cleaning every day, when face and hair are sticky with salt rime, and there is a pleasant sharpness of taste on either lip. Their gale is a matter of staying indoors, of avoiding the sea-wall, and carefully closing all windows. The sea is yellow and disturbed; far away it is of a peculiar light green, like

dead pea-pods, and from its bosom there arises a thin white veil of spray, and there is no perspective. Sky and water meet in a gray uncertainty a short way beyond the pier-head. Occasionally a dripping coaster, some close-reefed brig mayhap, or a tiny schooner moves across the near horizon, making better weather of it than one would think.

Sailors of course have the monopoly of wind and weather. They alone are competent to judge whether it be a whole gale or half, or a mere capful of wind. It is their trade and calling to tussle with the elements. And Boreas is their chiefest enemy; without the double warmth of oil-skins and hope I think there would be very few sailors.

This preliminary leads where most thin and watery pathways do, into a gale of wind, and such a gale as few mortals ever have to meet. The tropics are gifted in this way; there have you cyclones, typhoons, tornados, aracans, vuthans, white squalls and black squalls, north-easters, monsoons, and the wild changes thereof. Of these most of us must perforce judge from the standpoint of our own paltry breezes, our bises, our siroccos and thin south-westers, our mistrals and Danubian squalls. All these long-named winds are cruel, but killing is not their mission. There is, however, a breath of heaven of which the sole mes-

sage is death. It is a wind with no fine-sounding name, for it belongs to the North, where men endure things and have no thought of naming them. It blows for six months of the year, with here and there a breathing space wherein to gather fresh impetuosity. It veers from south-south-west to north-west-by-north, and it is born upon the gray ice-fields round the pole. For many hundred miles it raves across the frozen ocean, gathering deathly coldness at every league. On its shoulders it carries tons of snow, and then striking land it rages and tears, howls, moans, and screams across Northern Europe into far-frozen Asia. In passing it clothes all Russia in white and still has plenty to spare for bleak Siberia, Northern China, and Japan. I have crouched and shivered beneath its breath, and the only thought that was not frozen up was that the prevalence of such a wind must assuredly depopulate any land. As a matter of fact this is almost the case, although a few northern races manage to live on in such numbers as to save extermination, and that is all. More than a third of them are partially or wholly blind. Their existence is a constant and unequal struggle against this same wind and its pitiless auxiliaries—snow and frost. The earth yields no increase here. A little sparse vegetation, sufficient

only to nourish miserable reindeer and a few horses; a scattering of pine-trees, and that is all. Although no sanctifying Spirit can be said to walk upon the waters, the sea alone sustains life, for men, dogs, and reindeer eat fish, not dried but frozen, when they can get it.

It was across this country, and in face of this wind, that a party of men and women made their way in the late summer five years ago. By late summer one means the first fortnight in July in these high latitudes. These travellers were twenty-one in number, sixteen men and five women. One woman carried a baby—a gaol-bird—born in prison—unbaptized. It did not count, not even as half a person, to any one except its mother. Men and women were dressed alike in good fur clothing, baggy trousers tucked into felt boots, long blouse-like fur coats, and caps with ear-flaps tied down. Boots, trousers, coats, and even caps bore signs of damage by water. When Northern Siberia is not frozen up it is in a state of flood, and travelling, except by water, is almost impossible. These people had come many miles by this comparatively easy method at imminent risk, for they had travelled north on the bosom of the flood. Since then they had literally burnt their vessels in order to cut off pursuit.

The men dragged light sledges, three to a sledge, and four resting. The women carried various more precious burdens, delicate instruments such as compasses and aneroids. Beneath the fur caps throbbed some singular brains, from under the draggled brims looked out some strange faces. There was a doctor among them, two army officers, a judge, and others who had not been allowed time to become anything, for they were exiled while students.

The whole party pressed forward in silence with tight-locked lips and half-closed eyes, for the rushing wind carried a fine blinding snow before it. Only one person spoke at times. It was the woman who carried the baby, and she interlarded her inconsequent remarks with snatches of song and bursts of peculiar cackling laughter. Suddenly she sat down on a boulder.

"I will sit here," she said, "in the warm sun."

The whole party stopped, and one of the women answered—

"Come, Anna," she said, "we cannot wait here." Still speaking she took her arm and urged her to rise.

"But," protested she who had been addressed as Anna, "where is the picnic to be?"

"The picnic, Anna Pavloski," said a small,

squarely-built man, coming forward and speaking in a wonderfully deep and harmonious tone of voice, "is to be held farther on. You must come at once."

"I think," she replied, gently, "that I will wait here for my husband. I expect him home from the office. He will bring the newspaper."

They were all grouped round the woman now except one man, and he stood apart with his back turned towards them. He had been dragging the foremost sledge, and the broad band of the trace was still across his shoulders. He had been leading the way, and seemed in some subtle manner to be recognized as chief and pioneer.

Again the woman who had first spoken persuaded; again the broad-shouldered man spoke in his commanding gentleness. It was, however, of no avail. Then after a few moments of painful hesitation, he left the group and went to where the leader stood alone.

"Pavloski," he said.

"Yes, doctor." He never turned his head, but stood, rigid and stern, looking straight before him, scowling with eyes from which the horror would now never fade, into the gray hopeless distance. No marble statue could reproduce the strong cold despair that breathed in every limb and feature.

"Something," said the doctor, "must be done. We are behind our time already."

"I suppose it is my duty to stay with you?" said Pavloski; "I cannot leave the party? I cannot stay behind?"

The little man made no answer. His silence was more eloquent than any words could have been. A dramatic painter could scarcely have found a sadder picture than these two friends who dared not to meet each other's eyes. And yet, in a moment, it was rendered infinitely sadder by the advent of a third person.

Swathed as she was in furs, it was difficult to distinguish that this was a woman at all, and yet to a close observer her movements, the manner in which she set her feet upon the ground, the suggestion of graceful curves in limb and form, betrayed that she was indeed a young girl. Her face confirmed it—gay blue eyes and a rosebud mouth, round cheeks delicately tinted despite the wild wind, and little wisps of golden hair straggling out beneath the ear-flaps, and gleaming against the dusky face.

"I," said this little woman, "will stay with her. Sergius, I will try and take her back. We will give ourselves up. It does not matter. Now that Hans

is dead I have nothing to live for. I have no husband."

Poor little maiden, she had never had a husband; the fatherly Russian Government had seen to that! But she chose to call Hans Onetcheff her husband. This same Onetcheff had been administratively exiled by mistake, and being delicate had died, at the mines, of prison consumption.

The little doctor winced. He was not a Nihilist at all, and never had been; but in personal appearance he had resembled one. There was something horribly real in the words that came from the girl's rosy lips. She shouted them, for the wind was so furious as to render conversation impossible; and in order to make herself heard, she raised her round cherub-like face with a very fascinating childishness of manner. Sergius Pavloski shook his head and moved a step or two towards the group half hidden by a fine driving snow.

"No," he answered. "We arranged it before leaving London. There is only one thing to be done."

The doctor and the girl exchanged a look of horror, and hesitated to follow him.

"It was agreed," he continued, mechanically,

"that the lives of all were never to be endangered for the sake of one. Tyars said that."

Slowly the two followed him. As they approached the group some of these stepped silently back, some walked away a few paces and stood apart with averted faces.

"Can you tell me," said the woman, looking up suddenly, and leaving the baby's face and throat fully exposed to the cruel wind, "whether I can find a lodging near here?"

She addressed Pavloski, who was standing in front of her. He made no answer, but presently turned away with a convulsive movement of lips and throat, as if he were swallowing something with an effort. Then he raised his voice, and addressing his companions generally, he said with the assurance of a man placed in a position to exact obedience—

"Will you all go on? Keep the same direction, north-by-west according to the compass. I shall catch you up before evening."

He stood quite still, like a man hewn out of stone—upright, emotionless, and quite determined—awaiting the fulfilment of his commands. All around him his companions waited. It almost seemed as if they expected the Almighty to interfere. Even to those who have tasted the bitterest cup that life has

ever brewed, this seemed too cruel to be true—too horrid! And the wind blew all around them, tearing, raging on. Some of them staggered a little, but none made a movement to obey the command of their leader; each seemed to dread setting an example to the others.

At last one man had the courage to do it. It was he who had spoken to Pavloski, the man whom they called doctor. He went towards one of the sledges and proceeded to disentangle the traces thrown carelessly down when a halt had been called. The men stepped silently forward and drew the cords across their shoulders.

The women moved away first, stepping softly on the silent snow, and like phantoms vanishing in the mist and windy turmoil. The men followed, dragging their noiseless sledges. The doctor stayed behind for a moment. When the others were out of earshot he went towards Pavloski and laid his mittened hand upon his arm.

"Sergius," he said with painful hesitation, "let me do it—I am a doctor—it will be easier."

Pavloski turned and looked at the speaker in a stupid, bewildered way, as if the language used were unknown to him. Then he smiled suddenly in a

sickening way; it was like a cynical smile upon the face of the dead.

"Go!" he said, pointing to windward, where their companions had disappeared. "Go with them. Let each one of us do his duty. It will be a consolation whatever the end may be."

The doctor was bound in honour to obey this man in all and through all. He obeyed now, and left Sergius Pavloski alone with his mad wife and his helpless babe. As he moved away he heard the woman prattling of the sun, and the birds, and the flowers.

He turned his face resolutely northwards and pressed forward into the icy wind; but a muffled gurgling shriek broke down his strong resolution. Without stopping, he glanced back over his shoulder with a gasp of horror. Sergius Pavloski was kneeling with his back to the north; but he was not kneeling on the snow, for the doctor saw two fur-clad arms waving convulsively, and between the soles of Pavloski's great snow-boots he caught sight of two other feet drawn up in agony.

"Good God," exclaimed the man aloud, "forgive him!"

And with bloodshot eyes and haggard lips he stumbled on, not heeding where he set his feet.

He fell, and rose again, scarce knowing what he did. Despite the freezing wind, the perspiration ran down his face, blinding him. It froze, and hung in little icicles on his moustache and beard.

"Good God," he mumbled again, "forgive him!"

And in the agony of his strong mind his brain lost all power of concentration. His lips continued to frame those four words over and over and over again, until they became bereft of all meaning, and lapsed into a mere rhythmic refrain, keeping time with the swing of his sturdy legs.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE NEVA.

It is a thousand pities that Englishmen, Americans, Russians, Scandinavians, and others of a Northern nationality are so difficult to write about. The manner in which these large men persistently ignore the emotions, and continuously refuse to play to the gallery, as it were, simply forces the astute novelist to seek material elsewhere. And so we have the Anglo-Italian, the Anglo-French, the Anglo-South American novel. They are so picturesque, these Giovannis, and Pippis, and Andrés. They bubble over so conveniently with love rhapsodies; they are so deft with their knives; and their *per bacchos* and *sacrés* and *carrambas* look so well in italics—lending a local colour, you know. And then it is so easy to know what they are about because they are so frankly emotional. They weep so often, and usually on the bosom of an aged mother, or beneath the shadow of the "Porta del Popolo," or some other porta that sounds local in its tendency; while an honest English

young man called John or Andrew never gives one a chance. One cannot make obvious to the gallery the emotions that are passing within his breast because he absolutely refuses to gesticulate, to cast himself about upon the furniture, or to apostrophize the heavens. And the greater portion of English-speaking novel readers is, so to speak, the gallery.

There is small consolation to be derived from that self-complacency born of a conviction that virtue is sometimes unrewarded. The little boy who tells the truth generally has a bad time, while the small follower of Ananias walks in the sunshine of popularity. We do not generally admit this unfortunate fact in mixed circles on account of the children, but it is there nevertheless. And the children grow up—some of them alas! grow up into novelists, others into felons. The seed is sown in the one as in the other, and neither seem capable of helping it. It is with the novelists that we have to do. Young Ananias possesses an imagination, and he proceeds to tell most iniquitous . . . No! I mean he goes on to describe men and women, who not only have never lived, but to whom life would be impossible in this matter-of-fact planet. He draws lurid pictures of adventure in countries which he has only seen casually on the map—he describes deeds of bravery and feats

of agility which any common-sense person must recognize at once as quite impossible. Perhaps he has a far-reaching, an unclean mind; he proceeds to wallow in realistic details which are not only sickening, but totally untrue to nature. Never mind! Ananias gets on famously, comes out in weekly parts in the cheap newspapers, and finishes up in a yellow-back novel on the railway book-stalls depicting the murder of one faultlessly dressed gentleman by another—an every-day occurrence, of course.

Now the unpopular good boy drones away his time in descriptions of events that really happen or have happened. He sets down men and women as he has seen and known them, he narrates their deeds in such language as he commands, and neglects to conjure up impossibilities for them to perpetrate. He sacrifices dramatic construction on the altar of Truth, and fails to make use of certain well-known devices. He does not, for instance, cause a son to narrate at length to the mother whose skirt he has never left the sad story of his own life in the first volume. He does not make husband and wife exchange terrible confidences after twelve or thirteen years of married life—said confidences being of such a nature that unless they had habited different parts of the globe mutual concealment would have been quite impos-

sible. No; this blind fictionist makes his fiction possible; he tells the truth, and of course he is unpopular.

If Matthew Mark Easton had arrived in St. Petersburg in any other manner it should have been narrated here. If he had come down in the middle of the Admiralty gardens in a Nihilistic balloon in the dead of night the details of his descent should have been set down here. If he had exchanged mysterious meaningless paraphrases with picturesque conspirators those observations should have been faithfully given here—in italics. But he did none of these things. He merely arrived by train from Libau, and took a droschky to the Hôtel de France for which he paid seventy kopecks. His passport was in perfect order, although smeared most lamentably by the clerk of the Russian consulate who *viséd* it in London. This small American was an experienced and clever traveller, as most of his countrymen are, and was as much at home in St. Petersburg as he might have been in Boston or London. Moreover, he had been in St. Petersburg and in the Hôtel de France before. His nationality was also in those days fraught with a certain weight of favourable prejudice, for that was three years ago, before the Siberian question had attracted transatlantic attention.

Matthew Mark Easton therefore made himself quite at home in the Hôtel de France, and dined very comfortably at the *table d'hôte,* of which certain small eccentricities failed to surprise him. He lighted his interprandial cigarette at the candle placed between each two guests for the purpose, and fell very naturally into Slavonic habits; but it is perhaps worth noticing that he somewhat carefully concealed his knowledge of the Russian language. This alone was proof of his intimacy with the internal economy of the White Empire; for old travellers there know that it is better to reserve one's Russian for a necessity, even if he have no other purpose than enjoyment in his wanderings. After dinner he retired to his room, not however without being forced to ward off several singularly leading questions put to him by a bland landlord. These questions were obviously of one and the same purpose; namely, to discover the reason of Easton's presence in Russia. Had he been there before? Did he admire the town? Was not the Newski Prospect unrivalled? Where was he going after he quitted the Northern capital? To all of these Matthew Mark Easton replied vaguely and almost densely, with a singularly strong American accent. He was not surprised to be awakened the next morning by the wildest carillon that ever pealed from

cathedral spire, for he had heard the remarkable performance of St. Michael's bells before.

After breakfast he wandered forth, guide-book in hand, having refused the services of a polyglot individual who professed to be the brother-in-law of the hall-porter. The landlord himself directed Easton to the Newski Prospect, which however was not considered interesting until the afternoon. Nevertheless he went that way, and finally found himself on the English quay. He crossed the Neva, still in the same tourist's gait, and lost himself among the smaller commercial streets of the Vasili Ostroff. Presently by the merest accident he found himself opposite a small warehouse bearing the name "L. Ogroff" in painted letters above the blind windows of what had once been a shop. He pushed open the curtained door, and addressing himself to a pleasant-looking girl who was seated at a counter adding up the columns of a ledger, he mentioned the name "Loris Ogroff."

"Yes," answered the girl in perfect English, "he is in. Who are you?"

"Matthew Mark Easton."

"Ah! Come in."

She pointed to a little swing-door in the counter, and did not offer to open it as a born and bred ser-

vitor would have done. Then she led the way into an inner room which was lined with shelves containing long wooden boxes like miniature coffins. There were upon the table some rolls of common cloth.

"Mr. Ogroff is apparently a tailor," hazarded Easton in a conversational way, seeing that the girl was pretty and pleasant-looking.

"Yes," she answered, with a short laugh; "a very cheap one."

She had not relinquished her hold of the door-handle, and stood in a graceful attitude looking at him with clear blue eyes, in which a great interest and a slight amusement were provokingly mingled. She evidently knew all about him, and her attitude physical and mental was notably devoid of that shyness or embarrassment which is considered correct and polite between young persons of opposite sexes who meet without introduction.

"He is up-stairs in the cutting-out room," she continued, with a twinkle in her childish eyes. "I shall tell him."

Easton stood looking at the curtained door after she had closed it. Then he picked up a piece of rough cloth and examined its texture critically.

"I am half inclined," he reflected aloud, "to

become a Nihilist. There are alleviations even in the lot of a tailor's assistant of the establishment Ogroff."

In a few moments the door opened again, and a stout man entered with a bow. He shook hands without speaking, and pointed to a chair. Round his thick neck he wore a yellow tape-measure with the two ends hanging down in front. Before speaking he took up some rolls of cloth that stood in the corner, and unfolding a portion of each he ranged them upon the table in front of Easton.

We last saw this man in Easton's rooms in London. His name was not mentioned then because there was not much in a name for him. It was not Ogroff then. He was not minutely described, because a written description is not always of great value. For instance, he was in London a dark grizzled man with a beard—in this shop in the Vasili Ostroff, St. Petersburg, he was a fair, hairless man.

"Well?" he said asthmatically at length.

"Not a word . . . !" replied Easton; "and you?"

The man shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Not a word. I have written to you all that I heard. I wrote on the fifth of May; have you destroyed the letter?"

"Yes—burnt it."

"Well!" ejaculated the Russian, misusing the word. "I heard," he continued,—"never mind how —that they all got away, in good health, at the proper time—that is, in the early summer of the year before last. They were followed, but they destroyed all the horses and boats as they went, and the pursuit was necessarily given up."

"Since that," inquired Easton, "not a word?"

"Not a word."

"There has been no semi-official account of the matter in the newspapers?"

"No; it has been hushed up. The official report is (as far as I can learn) that certain exiles and prisoners escaped; that they were pursued by Cossacks, and that the chase was only given up when their death by starvation was a moral certainty."

"And," said Easton, "are they struck out of the list?"

"Yes; they are struck out."

The fat man spoke in a gasping way, and his breathing was attended by a peculiar hollow sound. It was noticable that he never paused to think before replying to any question, and never referred to note-book or written memorandum. All his information was on the surface ready for use, and all his memoranda were mental. One cannot search in a

man's mind for incriminating evidence. He who at present passed under the name of Loris Ogroff was known among his colleagues as an eminently "safe" man.

"I am going to look for them," announced Easton, after a pause.

The Russian raised his flaxen eyebrows.

"Ah! I understood that you were condemned—by the doctors."

"No, not condemned; they merely said, 'If you go it will kill you.'"

"And still," said the Russian, calmly, "you go."

"Some one must," answered Easton with equal coolness. "You cannot—you are too fat!"

"No; I do not travel now as I used. Besides, I have other work. My hands are full, as well as my waistcoat."

"I am going by land," continued the American. "I leave Petersburg to-morrow morning."

Ogroff rose from his chair.

"You must go now," he said. "You have been here long enough; we are watched, you know. Here in Petersburg we all watch each other. I will send you a fur-lined travelling cloak to-night to your hotel —the Hôtel de France, I suppose?"

"Yes; how do you know?"

"I get a copy of each day's passport-returns from a friend of mine in the police."

"But," protested Easton, "I do not want a fur cloak."

"Never matter; it will be useful—you can give it away. It is to allay suspicion."

"All right; send it."

The Russian held out a fat white hand.

"Good-bye, you brave American," he said.

"G'bye!" returned Easton with a laugh.

CHAPTER XX.

THEY TRIED IT.

"WELL, at all events we have tried it!" Ordinary words if it please you! Ordinary words enough in all sooth, and words we must all make use of sooner or later. But all words are ordinary, and it is only the manner of speaking them, the circumstances in which they are spoken, and the person to hear, that lend a human interest to the tritest commonplaces.

These words were spoken by the mere remnant of a man to a solitary companion while both looked out—peered through the twilight—on death. He who spoke crouched in a singular way on the hard snow, supporting himself on one fur-clad arm. He could not stand, for he had but one leg. The other had been cut off just above the knee—a recent amputation undoubtedly, for the empty trouser-leg, rudely tied with rope, was stained a deep suggestive colour. His face was a horrid sight to look upon, for here and there in the pasty yellow flesh were deep indentations of half-healed sores, the result of

frost-bite. One eye was quite closed by a swelling which deformed the features and drew them all up. He spoke in a mumbling way, as if his tongue were swollen or diseased, and the language was the most dramatic of all tongues—Russian.

His companion, a short, thick-set man, stood beside him; but he stood weakly, and the terribly sunken lines of his cheeks told a story only slightly less horrible than that depicted by the face and form of the cripple. Both faces alike bore that strange dry look which tells unerringly of starvation. All who were in Southern India at the time of the Madras famine know that look, and those who have never seen it before divine its meaning at once. It is unmistakable, like an earthquake.

Behind these two men lay a vast snow-clad country, rolling away in rounded gray curves into fathomless mist. On their left was a slight declivity, terminated by a broad flat valley, extending beyond sight in a due southerly direction. This was the river Yana. Within a few yards of the two men, at their backs, stood a rude, ill-shapen hut, built clumsily and ignorantly of snow. Its low doorway faced the north, and amidst the gloom of its interior there were discernible a number of heaps, apparently formed of old and tattered fur clothing. These

were dead men; the women of Sergius Pavloski's party had not lived to see the Arctic Ocean. Amidst the dead the living had crouched and slept that dull, dreamless sleep that comes to human beings in extremely cold climates. In front of the two men extended that which had been their bourne, their hope, their one desire—the Arctic Ocean. There was no water visible, but as far as the eye could penetrate a heaving, surging field of pack-ice. Low down in the far northern sky there hovered a yellow shimmer—the ice-blink.

It was the second of September, and in all probability the ice was gathering for the winter. Already it extended along the deserted shore, in a belt twenty miles deep, without a lead, and from the continuous sounds of groaning and grinding it was certain that more was pressing in, adding confusion to the frozen chaos. The man who stood gave a short heartrending laugh as he looked out over the frozen sea.

"Yes," he said, "we have tried it."

There was a pause, and then the cripple—Sergius Pavloski—spoke again.

"Of course," he said, almost unintelligibly, "we have failed; but still our failure may teach others, and we have kept it secret. Those who want to know will never know. They will always be in un-

certainty as to whether we have escaped and are living hidden in America, in Europe, perhaps in Russia. We shall be more terrible, doctor, dead than alive."

"I hope so."

"I, at all events, shall be, for you say that I could not live a week in a warm climate. This leg of mine is less painful to-day; perhaps it is healing."

"No, Pavloski, I have told you a dozen times it is not healed, it is only frozen. It can never heal. The moment it thaws you will die."

A sickly smile passed across his unsightly features, and there was silence for a time—the deathly expectant silence of the far North. They were both looking out across the ice. It was a habit they had acquired during the last two months. At length Pavloski raised his mittened hand and extended it outwards true north, like the needle of a compass.

"I wonder," he mumbled, "if Tyars is out there."

The doctor shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I wonder," he said, "why you entrusted this to an Englishman."

It was an old subject thoroughly thrashed out; an old point of dissension. When men see death staring them in the face they are not conversational

on general topics; they only discuss their chances of life.

"If I had had the whole world to choose from I should not have selected another man," said Pavloski; "but there was no choice in the matter."

"I suppose," said the doctor, with an ill-concealed sneer, "that he has turned back."

"I will swear by St. Paul that he has not done that!"

The words were not pleasant to hear from lips already stiffening in anticipation of death.

"Then where is he?"

"Dead!" was the answer. "If Claud Tyars had been alive he would have come. He is not here, therefore he is dead!—Ough!"

He stopped and fell back fainting with pain. In his excitement he had moved, and had allowed some of his weight to rest upon the raw stump of his leg. In a second the doctor was kneeling on the snow beside him, raising his head, touching his lips with snow. It was a poor restorative, but there was nothing else at hand. One cannot offer to a dying man even the tenderest piece of an old sealskin mitten.

Without waiting for consciousness to return he attempted to lift the cripple, intending to carry him

within the little snow-hut, but the movement brought back Pavloski's failing senses, and he shook his head in token that he wished to be left where he lay.

"No," he said, after gasping twice for breath; "I would rather die out here."

The doctor's bare hand crept within the tattered sleeve towards the pulse. He said nothing. There was nothing to say.

"I do not want," continued Pavloski, brokenly, "to see their—faces. I—brought them here.—It is my fault."

He lay for some moments with his lips apart, his uninjured eye half closed, then he spoke again.

"I suppose—the good God—will know how to revenge all this.—If they, the Romanoffs—the Czar—had twenty lives, and we could take—them all—we might pay—the debt;—but they have—only one life—to take, that would be too short—a punishment. God will know how to do it—will He not, doctor?"

"Yes," said the sweet deep voice of the doctor, "God will know how to do it."

"Pray," said the dying man, "pray to Him to do it—well!"

Then his head fell back and he breathed

regularly and softly. But this was not the end. Presently the blackened lips began to move, and he spoke in quite a different voice, so different as to startle his listener. It was soft and even, as if recounting a dream not long dispelled.

"It is not yet a year ago," he said. "There were seven of us, four Russians, two Englishmen, and an American. Four Russians, two Englishmen, and an American—what a strong combination! The Russians to go into action on land, the Englishmen on the sea, and the sharp-witted American to watch and plot and scheme. I remember the last time we met was at Easton's house; we eat and drank together. Two of us are dead, and I am nearly—dead. Tyars and Grace—where can they be? They are out there, doctor, in front of us—to the north. I—I shall go and . . . meet them."

The lips closed with a sudden snap, and the doctor leant eagerly forward. Sergius Pavloski was dead. Perhaps his babbled words were true. He said that he would go to meet them, and it is not for us to maintain that this was the mere wandering of a mind harassed by much affliction, paralyzed by the cold touch of Death. It is not for us to assert that the departing soul is never vouchsafed a gleam of light, of that Light which is not seen on land or

sea, to guide it upward to its rest. Perhaps indeed he had gone to meet them, to find these two Englishmen in whom his faith had never wavered.

Then the survivor rose to his feet. It had begun to snow gently and in large flakes—a snow that would cover the ground to the depth of twelve inches in half that number of hours. As it fell it gradually covered the dead man, even to his face and eyes, which were already cold.

Presently the doctor moved a little and, turning slowly round, scanned the near horizon. He could not see the pack-ice now, for the snow was blowing in from the north, wreathing and curling as it came. The wind had dropped a little, and so the ice was still, and its groan was heard no more. The silence was terrible—that silence that comes between two squalls at sea. Suddenly the snow ceased, and only a few feathery flakes floated aimlessly in the air. The atmosphere cleared and displayed to the man's dim vision a lifeless world of virgin white. Even the footsteps of his late companion and himself were half obliterated; the body of Sergius Pavloski was covered, and presented the appearance of a churchyard mound, for the snow had drifted heavily at the first rush of the squall.

Then this lone man moved towards the snow-

hut, and entered it on his hands and knees. He took no notice of the dead—one soon gets accustomed to them—but fumbled about among the baggage piled up in one corner.

While he worked he mumbled to himself. Probably he was only half conscious of his actions, as men are in extreme cold. It is very easy to sit in a warm room and reflect that we should never lose our heads in a snowstorm; that we should never be so weak-minded as to give way to that dazed drowsiness which comes from snow alone. Fatigues on land or sea have their characteristics, but in neither case is the brain affected as it is by a great fatigue borne on snow. Mountaineers know this, and the good brothers of St. Bernard; they know that the strongest man is forced to use his utmost strength of mind to keep serene and calm while battling on snow against a snowstorm; whereas an ordinary sailor-man, of no great courage, can face a gale almost unmoved.

But this man's bodily strength seemed to be almost unimpaired. He dragged the heavy sledges aside without any great effort. He had been, and was still, a man of exceptional strength—broadly built upon short legs, with a large square head. It was somewhat singular that he should be apparently

far from death while his companions had succumbed to cold and starvation; but this undoubtedly lay in the fact that he was a doctor. His intimate knowledge of the human frame had doubtless enabled him to take a greater care of himself than he could force upon his companions. He had, no doubt, been strong enough in purpose to endure a hunger which his dead comrades had satisfied by illegitimate means. This is no place to go into details, for these pages may come to the eyes of many who will be no wiser and no better for learning aught of death. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that any of us are in any way benefited by a study of this subject from a fictional point of view. We meet it often enough in real life.

That strange law which we call Chance has one singular trick; it almost invariably sets the wrong man in the wrong place. This is, of course, according to the limit of our terrestrial sight, as the Scotch ministers so frequently say; though it would be hard for us to see with any other sight, so the rider is superfluous. This Russian doctor was an instance of the perverseness of Chance. He was not a Nihilist, though he had been mistaken for one, which, as far as he was concerned, came to the same thing. He was not made of that stuff out of which are fashioned

lonely adventurers, solitary travellers, or self-sufficing Stoics. He was merely a garrulous, gregarious little fellow with a decided bodily tendency to stoutness, which tendency had not been fairly treated. He had never lived alone—had never thought of doing such a thing. What a man, you will say, to place upon the edge of the frozen Arctic Ocean with no human life within a radius of three hundred miles, in the month of September! Exactly so. But that is precisely the man whom Chance would select to place there. Moreover, she made that selection—hence this record. From among those iron-hearted, desperate fugitives, she carefully chose the wrong man to be last survivor; for there is no such thing as the Survival of the Fittest, though we write it with the capitalest of letters. Chance sees to that.

And yet in a dull, stupid way he realized the responsibilities of his position. He dragged two of the sledges out of the hut, and with a hatchet broke them up. Then he took the two strongest pieces of each—the crossbars—and bound them securely together, thus forming a rough pole. This he erected on a little mound where the snow was thin, building it up with such debris as he could lay his hands upon. It stood up gauntly, almost the only object within sight that was not white. It was a mere pole,

the thickness of a man's wrist, and yet it was probably visible ten miles off against its gleaming surroundings.

When this was completed there was nothing left for him to do. There was no record to be preserved— no record of the sufferings and of the great struggle. The earlier acts of the tragedy were lost, and no earthly lips left to tell of them. After all, what did it matter? The last act wiped them all out. When the game is played there is nothing to be gained by the recapitulation of its chances.

The lone man stood back and contemplated his rude erection. It was rough, but strong enough to last a year or two. Then he looked at the remains of the light American sledges which he had just broken up.

Suddenly an idea came to him.

"It would be good," he mumbled, "to be warm once more . . . just once."

And he piled up the wood in a little heap. He crawled into the hut and presently returned bearing a good-sized tin bottle labelled "Spiritus." He poured the contents over the wood and struck a match. In a moment the blue flames leapt up and the wood crackled. He crouched down to the lee-ward side so close that his clothes were singed and

gave forth a sharp acrid smell. He withdrew his mittens and held his bare scarred hands right into the flames.

"Ah," he muttered in a gurgling voice, "that is good!"

But it did not last long. The wood was light and very dry, and in five minutes there was nothing left but a few smouldering ashes.

The doctor rose to his feet and looked long and steadily out to the north over the broken ice. It is hard to give up hope, and few men are ever forced to do so. Then he looked round him as a man looks round a room before starting on a long journey to see that he has left nothing undone. He had lived in this spot for more than two months, and its bleak surroundings were very familiar to him. His eyes lingered over each white mound and hillock—not lovingly, for it was horribly dismal, almost too dismal to be part of this world at all.

Strange to say his eyes finished their inspection by looking up to heaven. The great snow-clouds were rolling south, bearing in their huge rounded bosoms the white pall to cover a continent for many months to come. But this man seemed to be looking beyond the clouds, seeking to penetrate the dim ether. He was not looking at the sky, but into

heaven. At last he gave a contemptuous little shrug of the shoulders, full of a terrible meaning. The next moment he sought for something in the inner pocket of his fur tunic. There was a gleam of dull rusted metal, and he raised his hand towards his open mouth. At the same instant a sharp report broke upon that echoless silence, and a little puff of white smoke was borne southward on the breeze.

CHAPTER XXI.

THREE YEARS AFTER.

THERE are some women to whom even Time is merciful. It is an undeniable truth that those among our gentle companions through this pilgrimage who are fair to look upon may surely count upon some allowance from men both young and old. Charity may cover a multitude of sins—perhaps it does; I cannot say, for I have never had an opportunity of studying its habits for any length of time. But Beauty undoubtedly covers more. Not only have plain women to bear with a thousand minute slights from every pretty face they meet, but if they be observant they will realize soon enough that there is a special code of laws tacitly allowed to the owners of these pretty faces. They have no need to be scrupulous; it does not matter much that they be honest, so long as they are gracious, and fascinating, and kind at intervals. The necessity of working for their own livelihood is rarely forced upon them. Beauty in distress is proverbially sure of relief. But there is one enemy

upon whom all charms are lost, to whose heart red lips, soft hands, and pleading eyes cannot reach. This enemy is Time. It is not only around dull eyes that he scores his mark; he touches rosy cheeks and pale alike; he sets his weight upon straight shoulders as on crooked bones. But some there are to whom he is kind, and these are usually such as fear him not. Some folks are said to defy Time, but it is safer to meet him with a fearless smile, for he is not to be defied. He carries more in his hands than we can tell or dare defy. Agnes Winter was not the woman to make this mistake, and Time had dealt very leniently with her. At the beginning of life, or at its end, three years are an important period, but in the middle of existence their weight is less perceptible. They seemed to have passed very lightly over the small phase of existence working itself out unheeded by the world in the drawing-room where we last saw Agnes Winter, and where we now find her again.

The room was unchanged, and the Agnes Winter dwelling therein was the same woman except in one very small matter. She had always been distinguished by a cheery repose of manner which was not without its sense of comfort for those around her; by its presence she had acquired the reputation

of being very capable and singularly tactful — the sort of woman, in a word, whom a clever hostess would be glad to secure at her table. This characteristic had given place to a certain restlessness —a well-concealed restlessness; but still it was there. The smile with which she now faced that grim antagonist Time was not quite so confident as of yore. Her being subtly suggested one who, having been burnt, respects the fire. Perhaps this change was more noticeable in the lady's eyes than in her person. The same strong, finished grace attended her movements, but her eyes lacked repose. They were the eyes of one who has waited and waited in vain. I need hardly say more, for we all meet the glance of such eyes frequently enough. There is a good deal of waiting to be done here below, and most of it is vain. None need search very far afield to find such eyes as now looked up nervously towards the door at the sound of the large old-fashioned bell, pealing in the basement.

"Who is that?" said Agnes Winter to herself. "Who can that be?"

She rose and set one or two things in order about the room, and after glancing at the clock, stood motionless with her tired eyes fixed on the door, listening intently. The bell was by no means

a silent member of its fraternity, and there was nothing unusual in its peal, although the early hour precluded the possibility of visitors. Miss Winter had therefore no special reason for uneasiness, but people who are waiting have at times strange forebodings. While she stood there the door was opened, and the maid announced—

"Mr. Easton."

Matthew Mark Easton came into the room immediately afterwards. He shook hands rather awkwardly, as one sees a man go through the ceremony whose fingers are injured.

"How do you do, Miss Winter?" he said, gravely, managing to spread out that salutation into such length that the door was perforce closed before he had finished.

"Well," she said, in a sharp, unsteady voice, ignoring his question; "what news have you?"

As he laid aside his hat he looked round almost furtively.

"I have no news of the ship, Miss Winter," he replied.

She begged him by a courteous gesture of the hand to take a chair, and seated herself beside the table where her work and books lay idle.

"Tell me," she said, "what you have done."

He came forward in obedience to her wish, and in doing so emerged from the darker side of the room into the full light of the autumn sun. In doing this he unconsciously called attention to his own personal appearance. The last three years had left a twofold mark on him. In face he was an older man, for there were a hundred minute crow's-feet round his eyes; and his thin cheeks, formerly sallow, now brown and healthy, were drawn into minute downward-tending lines; added to this was a distinct droop at the corners of the mouth which had always been so ready to smile. The meaning of it all was starvation, or at the best a lamentable insufficiency of nutriment at some past period. In his form and carriage there was a noticeable improvement, for it is a remarkable thing that the eyes and face bear far longer the marks and results of starvation than the body that was starved. The American was obviously a stronger man than when Miss Winter had last seen him; his chest was broader, his step firmer, and his glance clearer.

"I have," he said, "explored every yard of the coast from the North Cape to the Yana river."

"And why did you stop at the Yana river?" asked the lady, with an air of knowing her ground.

"I will tell you afterwards," he said; "when Miss

Grace is with you—if—if she does not object to my presence."

Miss Winter thought for a moment.

"No," she answered, without meeting her companion's glance; "she will like to see you, I think. I will send a note round to her at once."

She drew writing materials towards her and wrote—"Mr. Easton is here; come at once." She read it aloud, and ringing the bell, despatched the note.

"I presume," said Easton, slowly, "that the admiral is still with us?"

"Yes, he is alive and well."

Easton made no comment. His manner was characterized by that singular repose which has no rest in it. He looked round him, noting little matters with a certain accuracy of observation as people do when they stand on the brink of a catastrophe. The lightness of touch which had previously characterized his social method seemed now to have left him. This was not a grave man, but a light-hearted man rendered grave by the force of circumstances. The two are quite apart. The presence of one in a room is conducive to restfulness; the other is a disturbing element, however quiet his demeanour may be.

Miss Winter in her keener feminine sensibility

was conscious of this tension, and it affected her, urging her to speak at the cost of sense or sequence.

"Helen," she said, "is . . . you will find her a little changed."

He made a convulsive little movement of his thin lips, and gasped as if swallowing something.

"Ah!" he uttered, anxiously.

"Yes; she used to take life gravely, and now . . ."

"And now, Miss Winter?"

"She is altered in that respect—you will see."

He raised his eyes to her face. His glance was as quick as ever, but his eyes did not twinkle now; they were grave, and the rapidity of their movement, being deprived of brightness, was almost furtive. He did not press the question, taking her last remark as a piece of advice, as indeed it was intended. Then they sat waiting, until the silence became oppressive. Suddenly Easton spoke with a return of the quaint narrative manner which she remembered as characteristic.

"One evening," he said, "as we were steaming down the Baltic last week—a dull warm evening, Tuesday, I guess—I was standing at the stern-rail with my arms beneath my chin when something fell upon my sleeve. I looked at it curiously, for I had not seen such a thing for years. It was a tear—

most singular! I feel like crying now, Miss Winter; I should like to sit down on that low chair in the corner there and—cry. There are some disappointments that come like the disappointments of childhood—when it rained on one's birthday and put a stop to the picnic."

Miss Winter said nothing. She merely sat in her gracious, attentive attitude and looked at him with sympathetic eyes.

"It shows," he continued, presently, "how entirely one may be mistaken in one's own destiny. I never should have considered myself to be the sort of person into whose life a catastrophe was intended to break."

She still allowed him to continue, and after a pause he took advantage of her silence.

"Some men," he went on, "expect to have other lives upon their conscience—military officers, ship-captains, engine-drivers—but their own lives are more or less at equal stake, and the risk is allowed for in their salary, or is supposed to be. I have thirty lives set down on the debit side of my account, and some of those lives are chips off my own."

"Thirty?" questioned Miss Winter. "There were only eighteen men on board, all told."

"Yes; but there were others. I shall tell you when Miss Grace comes. It is not a story that one cares to relate more often than necessary."

They had not long to wait. In a few moments they heard the sound of the front-door bell. Easton rose from his seat. He did not go towards the door, but stood in the middle of the room, looking rather breathlessly towards Miss Winter. She it was who moved to the door and opened it, going out to the head of the stairs to meet Helen.

"Dear," he heard her say, and her voice was smooth and sweet, "Mr. Easton is here; he has come back."

There was no answer, and a moment later Helen Grace stood before him. As he took the hand she stretched out to him with an air almost of bravado, he saw at once the difference hinted at by Miss Winter. It lay in the expression of her face, it hovered in her eyes, and yet I cannot describe it. I can only lamely set it forth on the chance of its recognition by some who have seen it in the faces around them. To those who have not encountered it, I can only say that I trust they never will, especially in their mirror. It was not recklessness, for educated women are rarely reckless, and yet it

savoured of defiance—defiance of something—perhaps of the years that lay ahead. It is to be seen in most ball-rooms, and the faces carrying it are usually beautiful. The striking characteristic of such women is their impregnability. One cannot get at them. One may quarrel with them, make love to them, put them under an obligation, and never know them better. They may be sister, friend, even wife, and yet no companion. That effect of an immovable barrier never allows itself to be forgotten. And if you meet such women, though you may be unable to define it, that barrier will make itself felt. It was placed, riveted, dovetailed, cemented by the Past—a Past in which you had no part whatever. Such a look usually goes with a perfect dress, faultless carriage, and an impeccable *savoir-faire*. And Matthew Mark Easton recognized it at once, for he had lived and moved among such women, although the feminine influence in his home-life had been small.

"I am glad, Miss Grace," he said, "that you have done me the honour of coming."

And she smiled exactly as he expected—the hard inscrutable "society" smile, which never betrays, and is never infectious. She did not, however, trust herself so far as to speak. There was silence for a moment—such a silence and such a moment as leave

their mark upon the entire life. Easton breathed hard. He had no doubt at that time that he was bringing to each of these women news of the man she loved.

CHAPTER XXII.

SALVAGE.

At last he resolutely broke the silence.

"It is a long story," he said. "Will you sit down?"

Both obeyed him so mechanically and so rapidly that he had no time to prepare his words, and he hesitated.

"I—I have to tell you," he said, "that there is no news of the ship. She sailed from London three years and seven months ago. She was sighted by the whaler *Martin* on the third of May, three years ago, in the Greenland Sea, since when there is no word of her. It is the opinion of all the experts whom I have consulted that the vessel was crushed by ice, possibly a few weeks after she was sighted. Her crew and her officers have perished."

"You give us," said Miss Winter, "the opinions of others. What is your own?"

"Mine," he said, after a pause; "mine is the

same. There is no reason to suppose—there is no hope whatever."

"I gave that up two years ago," Helen stated, simply.

Easton made no comment; but presently he drew from his pockets some thin books, which he opened, disclosing that they were maps and charts.

"I will," he said, "explain to you the theory. Here where this date is written is the spot where the ship was spoken by the whaler. She was sailing in this direction. It is probable that she passed Spitzbergen in safety, although there was ice as far south as this thin blue line; this I have since ascertained. After passing Spitzbergen they would keep to the north. I take it that at this spot they entered the broken ice, and in all probability they were beset. There were at the beginning of June four separate gales of wind from the south-west. During one or other of those gales the ship was possibly crushed. Whether the crew had time to take to the ice and land provisions and boats, or whether it was sudden, is a matter of conjecture. But I am quite certain that every effort to save life, everything that was seamanlike and courageous, was done. It failed. We have all failed. Never was so complete an expedition fitted up. The officers were young, but

they were good men, and for Arctic work young men are a *sine quâ non*. What they lacked in experience of ice-work was supplied by their subordinate officers, who were carefully selected men. I can only add that I am truly sorry I did not go with them. I have discovered that the doctors were wrong. I could have stood the work, for I have done so, and harder."

He paused, bending over the chart, which he opened more fully, until it covered the whole table. He seemed to be thinking deeply, or perhaps choosing his words. The ladies waited for him to continue.

"You see," he went on, "that all this is conjecture; but I have something else to tell you—something which is not a matter of conjecture. But first I must ask you to—assure me—that it goes no further. It must be a secret sacred to ourselves, for it is the secret of two men who—well, who know more than we do now."

"Of course," said Miss Winter.

"Of course," echoed Helen.

He went on at once, as if anxious to show his perfect reliance in their discretion.

"This expedition," he said, "was not despatched to discover the North-east passage. It had quite an-

other purpose, and I have determined that in justice to my two friends you must be told. But Admiral Grace must not know. There is a political side to the question which would render his position untenable if he knew. At present the history of this generation is not yet dry—it is like a freshly-written page, and one cannot yet determine what will stand out upon it when all the writing is equally developed. But there is a huge blot, which will come out very blackly in the hereafter. When this century is history all the world will wonder why Europe was so blind to the internal condition of its greatest country. I mean Russia. It is not far from England, and yet we know more of Russia over in America than you do here. It is a long story, and we are only at the beginning of it yet; but there can only be one end. You have perhaps heard of the Nihilists, and you possibly judge them by their name. You possibly think that they are atheists, iconoclasts, miscreants. They are none of these things. They are merely a political party. They are a party of men fighting the bravest uphill fight that has been attempted. Of course there is an extreme party, the Terrorists, who, driven to despair by heartless cruelty, thirsting for revenge, or blindly impatient at the slowness of their progress, resort to violent measures. But

the Nihilists must no more be judged from the Terrorist examples than your English Liberals must be confounded with Radicals."

Easton had left the table where the charts were spread. As he spoke he moved from side to side of the hearthrug, dragging his feet through the worn fur. He warmed to his work as he pleaded the cause for which he had laboured so hard, and it must be remembered that his diction was quick, almost to breathlessness,—the rapid speech of an orator, which is hardly recognizable when set down in sober black and white.

"These men," he continued, "have received singularly little help from other countries, which is accounted for by the fact that the suppression of news in Russia is an art. It is so difficult to learn the truth that most people are content with the falsehoods disseminated by the Government. But it is a singular fact that all who have studied the question, all who have lived in Russia and know anything whatever of the country, sympathize fully with the Nihilists. The contest is quite one-sided—between intellect and reckless courage on the one hand, and brutal unreasoning despotism on the other."

He paused for a moment, and then went on in

a humbler tone, as if deprecating the introduction of his own personality into this great question.

"I," he said, "have given half my life to this question, and Tyars—he knew a lot about it. Together we worked out a scheme for aiding the escape of a number of the most gifted Nihilists—men and women—who had been exiled to Siberia, who were dragging out a miserable felon's existence at the mines for no other crime than the love of their own country. Our intention was not political, it was humane. We did not wish to rescue the Nihilists, but the individuals, that they might live in comparative happiness in America. Tyars and I clubbed together and supplied the funds. I was debarred from going —forbidden by the doctors—please never forget that. But Tyars was the best man for the purpose to be found anywhere, and his subordinate officer, Oswin Grace, was even better than Tyars in his position. A rendezvous was fixed at the mouth of the Yana river—here on the map—and a date was named. Three Russians were despatched from London to aid in the escape. They did their share. The party arrived at the spot fixed, but the ship—the *Argo*—never reached them. I have been there. I have seen the dead bodies of nine men—one of whom, Sergius Pavloski, I knew—lying there. They seemed

to be waiting for the great Assize, when judgment shall be given. I was quite alone, for I expected to find something, and so no one knows. The secret is quite safe, for the keenest official in Siberia would never connect the attempted escape of a number of Nihilists with the despatch of a private English Arctic expedition, even if the bodies are ever found. There were no records—I searched."

He stopped somewhat suddenly, with a jerk, as a man stops in the narration of something which has left an ineffaceable pain in his life. After a little pause he returned to the table and slowly folded the ragged maps. The manner in which he did so betrayed an intimate knowledge of each frayed corner; but the movements of his fingers were stiff and awkward. There was a suggestion of consciousness in his every action; his manner was almost that of a cripple attempting to conceal his deformity. Helen was watching him.

"And you," she inquired gently; "you have endured great hardships?"

He folded the maps and placed them in the breast-pocket of his coat.

"Yes," he answered, without meeting her eyes, "I have had a bad time of it."

They waited, but he said nothing more. That

was the history of the last two years. Presently Helen Grace rose to go. She appeared singularly careless of detail. Part of the news she had learnt was old, the remainder was too fresh to comment upon. She kissed Miss Winter, shook hands with Matthew Mark Easton, and quickly left the room. Easton did not sit down again. He walked to the window, and standing there waited till Helen Grace had left the house, then he watched her as she crossed the road.

"These English ladies," he said, reflecting aloud, "are wonderful. They are like very fine steel."

When he turned he found Miss Winter standing beside the empty fire-place. Her attitude was scarcely an invitation for him to prolong his visit, such as might have been conveyed by the resumption of a seat.

"That," he said, buttoning his coat over the maps, "is why I did not go farther than the Yana river."

She smiled a little wearily.

"It was a wild enterprise," she said.

"I should like to try it again."

"Then it was not impossible?"

"No," he answered, "it was not impossible."

She reflected for some moments.

"Then why did it not succeed?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There is one obstacle," he answered at length, choosing his words with an unusual deliberation, "mentioned casually after others in bills of lading, policies of insurance, and other maritime documents —'the hand of God.' I surmise this was that Hand . . . and I admit that it is heavy."

"I always felt," said Miss Winter, musingly, "that something was being concealed from us."

"At one time I thought you knew all about it."

Miss Winter turned and looked at him in surprise.

"You once warned us against the Russian minister."

She thought for some moments, recalling the incident.

"Yes," she said at length, "I remember. It was the merest accident. I suspected nothing."

"Concealment," pleaded the American, "was absolutely necessary. It made no difference to the expedition, neither added to the danger nor detracted from it. But I did not want Miss Grace and yourself to think that these two men had thrown away their lives in attempting such a futile achievement as the North-east passage. They were better men than that."

She smiled a little wearily.

"No one will ever suspect," she said; "for even now that you have told me the story I can scarcely realize that it is true. It sounds like some tale of bygone days; and yet we have a living proof that it is all true, that it has all happened."

"Helen Grace . . ." he suggested.

She nodded her head.

"Of course you knew."

"Yes," he answered, briefly.

"And did you know about him?"

He did not reply at once, but glanced at her keenly.

"I knew that he loved her," was the answer.

She had never resumed her seat, and he took her attitude in the light of a dismissal. He made a little movement and mechanically examined the lining of his hat.

"Are you going to stay in England?" she asked.

"No;" and he offered her his hand; "I am going back to America for some years, at all events."

They shook hands and he moved towards the door.

"When you come back to England," she said, in rather a faint voice, "will you come and see me?"

He turned sharply.

"Do you mean that, Miss Winter?"

"Yes."

His quick dancing glance was flitting over her whole person.

"If I do come," he said, with a sudden relapse into Americanism, "I surmise it will be to tell you something else—something I thought I never should tell you."

She stood quite still, a dignified, self-possessed woman, but never raised her eyes.

"Do you still mean it?"

She gave a little nod. The door-handle rattled in his grasp, as if his hand were unsteady.

"I thought," he said, slowly, "that it was Oswin Grace."

"No."

"Never?" he inquired, sharply.

"Never."

"Then I stay in England."

And he closed the door again.

THE END.

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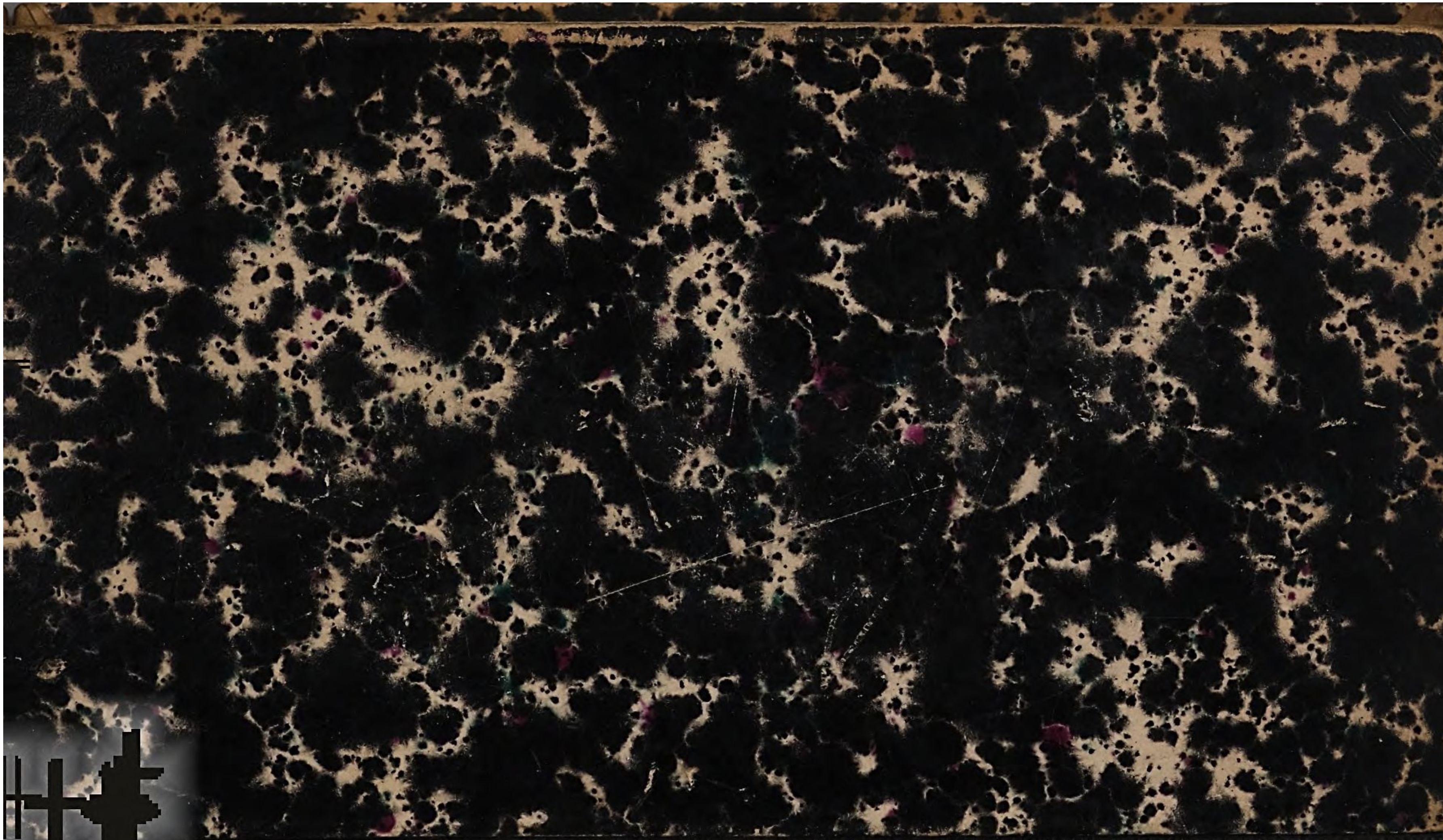

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